

Part 1

Letters from Nina

by Nina van Gorkom

Preface

I wrote letters about the Buddha's teaching from different parts of the world where my husband and I were posted. My letters are comments and answers to questions I received pertaining to problems which arise when we deal with other people, when we have sad experiences such as separation from those who are dear to us, as well as questions pertaining to the development of calm and of insight. I do not personally know all people I am writing to, but because of our common interest in the Dhamma it is as if I have met them all. Ms. Charupan Phengsrithong collected ten of my letters and translated them into Thai.

When we are occupied with our work and have a busy social life we may be inclined to think that we have no time to read the scriptures and consider what the Buddha taught. However, through correspondence about the Dhamma we can be stimulated to study more, read the scriptures, ponder over them and share with others what we learnt. In the scriptures we find an innumerable amount of advice for the solving of problems in daily life as well as reminders to practise the Dhamma in our conduct through body and speech.

I receive questions and remarks about lack of progress in the development of satipatthana. Progress is bound to be slow and at times we may be impatient. When we are wishing for a quick result of the practice we forget that it is the present moment which should be known as it is: only a nama or rupa, not self. When I, in my letters, quote from the scriptures I am reminding myself as well as others that it is urgent to be aware of realities such as seeing, visible object or thinking which appear now. There is so much to be learnt about the most common realities, ignorance is deeply rooted. At the moment of awareness of a reality there is no clinging to result, no thought of "my progress". The goal of the practice is to lessen the importance of self, but we keep on forgetting this. Through exchange of letters about the Dhamma we can be encouraged to persevere with the development of right understanding.

I wish to acknowledge my deepest respect and gratefulness to Ms. Sujin Boriharnwanaket who gave me great assistance in the understanding of the Buddhas teachings and their application, so that I could begin to walk the Path he taught. I also wish to express my appreciation to Ms. Charupan Phengsrithong who took great trouble in translating my letters into Thai.

I also want to mention that part of the 9th letter and the 4th letter were printed by the Buddhist Publication Society in Sri Lanka as Bodhi Leaves no. B 112. Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi gave his kind permission to use elsewhere what had been printed before by the B. P. S.

Introduction

I shall give an explanation and summary of some notions and terms of the Buddhist teachings in order to help those who are not familiar with them.

Before we learnt about the Buddhist teachings we were used to thinking of a person or self who exists, of "our mind" and "our body", but the Buddha taught that there is no person, no self. What we used to take for a person are only mental phenomena or nama and physical phenomena or rupa which arise and then fall away. Nama experiences an object, whereas rupa does not know anything. Nama and rupa are absolute realities or ultimate realities, paramattha dhammas. Paramattha dhammas have each their own characteristic, their own function, and they are true for everybody. Seeing, for example, is nama, it experiences visible object. It has its own characteristic which cannot be changed: seeing is always seeing, for everybody, no matter how we name it. The names of ultimate realities can be changed but their

characteristics are unalterable. Person, animal or tree are real in conventional sense, they are concepts we can think of, but they are not ultimate realities.

Citta or moment of consciousness is nama, it experiences an object. Different cittas experience objects through the six doorways of the senses and the mind. Seeing is a citta experiencing visible object or colour through the eyesense, and hearing is another type of citta experiencing sound through the earsense. Cittas are variegated: some cittas are wholesome, kusala, some are unwholesome, akusala, and some are neither kusala nor akusala. There is one citta arising at a time, but each citta is accompanied by several mental factors, cetasikas, which each perform their own function while they assist the citta in cognizing the object. Some cetasikas such as feeling (vedana) or remembrance (sanna), accompany each citta, whereas other types of cetasikas accompany only particular types of citta. Attachment, lobha, aversion, dosa, and ignorance, moha, are akusala cetasikas which accompany only akusala cittas. These cetasikas are called roots, because they are the foundation of the akusala citta. There are akusala cittas rooted in ignorance, moha, and attachment, lobha, and these are called lobha-mula-cittas (cittas rooted in lobha). There are akusala cittas rooted in moha and aversion, dosa, and these are called dosa-mula-cittas (cittas rooted in aversion). There are cittas rooted in only moha, and these are called moha-mula-cittas. Non-attachment, alobha, non-aversion, adosa, and wisdom, amoha or pa, are sobhana cetasikas, beautiful cetasikas, which can accompany only sobhana cittas. They are roots which are sobhana.

Citta and cetasika, which are both mental phenomena, nama, arise because of their appropriate conditions. Wholesome qualities and unwholesome qualities which arose in the past can condition the arising of such qualities at present. Since our life is an unbroken series of cittas, succeeding one another, wholesome qualities and unwholesome qualities can be accumulated from one moment to the next moment, and thus there are conditions for their arising at the present time.

Some cittas are results of akusala kamma and kusala kamma, they are vipakacittas. Kamma is intention or volition. Unwholesome volition can motivate an unwholesome deed which can bring an unpleasant result later on, and wholesome volition can motivate a wholesome deed which can bring a pleasant result later on. Akusala kamma and kusala kamma are accumulated from one moment of citta to the next moment, and thus they can produce results later on. Kamma produces result in the form of rebirth-consciousness, or, in the course of life, in the form of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and body-consciousness which is the experience of tangible object through the bodysense. These vipakacittas experience pleasant objects or unpleasant objects, depending on the kamma which produces them.

Cittas which experience objects through the six doors arise in a process of cittas. When, for example, hearing arises, it occurs within a series or process of cittas, all of which experience sound. Only hearing-consciousness hears, but the other cittas within that process, which is called the ear-door process, perform each their own function. Hearing-consciousness is vipakacitta, it merely hears the sound, it neither likes it nor dislikes it. After hearing-consciousness has fallen away there are, within that process, akusala cittas or kusala cittas which experience the sound with unwholesomeness or with wholesomeness. These cittas are called javana cittas; they perform within the process the function of javana or "running through the object". The javana cittas can be akusala cittas rooted in attachment, aversion or ignorance, or they can be kusala cittas. There are processes of cittas experiencing an object through the eye-door, the ear-door, the nose-door, the tongue-door, the body-door and the mind-door. After the cittas of a sense-door process have fallen away, the object is experienced by cittas arising in a mind-door process, and after that process has been completed there can be other mind-door processes of cittas which think of concepts. Cittas arise and fall away in succession so rapidly that it seems that cittas such as seeing and thinking of what is seen occur at the same time, but in reality there are different types of citta arising in different processes.

Citta and cetasika are mental phenomena, in Pali: nama. Nama experiences an object whereas physical phenomena, in Pali: rupa, do not know or experience anything. What we call the body consists of different kinds of rupa which arise and then fall away.

The Buddha explained in detail about the different namas and rupas of our life and the conditions through which they arise. Theoretical understanding of nama and rupa is a foundation for direct understanding of them. We should know, for example, that seeing is nama, and that eyesense and visible object are rupas.

The sense objects of visible object, sound, odour, flavour and tangible object are rupas and also the doors of the five senses are rupas. The cittas which experience the different objects are nama. There are different degrees of understanding, panna. Direct understanding of realities can be developed by sati, awareness or mindfulness of the nama and rupa appearing at the present moment. There are many levels of sati; sati is heedful, non-forgetful, of what is wholesome. There is sati with generosity, dana, with the observance of moral conduct, sila, with the development of tranquil meditation, samatha, and with the development of insight or right understanding, vipassana. In the development of insight sati is mindful of whatever reality presents itself through one of the six doors. Absolute realities, nama and rupa, not concepts, are the objects of mindfulness and right understanding.

When vipassana has been more highly developed, different stages of insight can be reached and eventually enlightenment can be attained, but this takes many lives. The person who has attained enlightenment is called an ariyan, or noble person. There are four stages of enlightenment and at these stages defilements are progressively eradicated. These stages are: the stage of the streamwinner or sotapanna, the stage of the once-returner or sakadagami, the stage of the non-returner or anagami and the stage of the arahat, the perfected one. The arahat who has eradicated all defilements, will not be reborn after he has passed away.

First Letter

Tokyo,

April 10, '71

Dear Friend,

I will repeat your questions and then give my comments.

"When feeling hot, there is not only nama, there is also rupa.

What is the characteristic of body-consciousness, kaya-vinnana?

What is the characteristic of the (bodily) feeling which accompanies body-consciousness?

What are the characteristics of the other feelings which do not accompany body-consciousness, but arise at other moments?

What is the characteristic of the rupa which is heat?"

These are questions which are bound to arise when we hear about the characteristics of nama and rupa and learn to be aware of them.

Kaya-vinnana, body-consciousness is the citta which experiences rupas which impinge on the bodysense. These rupas can be solidity, which can be experienced as hardness or softness; temperature, which can be experienced as heat or cold; motion, which can be experienced as motion or pressure.

The bodysense through which these rupas can be experienced is also rupa.

Bodysense is to be found not only on the outside of the body but everywhere, except in those parts which are insensitive, such as hair or nails. The

"Visuddhimagga" (XIV, 52) states that "it is to be found everywhere, like a liquid that soaks a layer of cotton". Also in those parts of the body we call "kidney" or "liver" there is body-sense; pain can be felt in these parts. When we notice any bodily sensation, be it ever so slight, it shows that there is impact on the

bodysense. When we remember this, it can condition awareness of different kinds of realities, also when the impact on the bodysense is very slight, or inside the body.

Body-consciousness which is vipakacitta, the result of kamma, arises in a process of citta which experience the object which impinges on the bodysense. When the object which impinges on the bodysense is unpleasant, body-consciousness is accompanied by painful (bodily) feeling (dukkha vedana) and when the object is pleasant, body-consciousness is accompanied by pleasant (bodily) feeling (sukha vedana). It cannot be accompanied by indifferent feeling. The object is unpleasant when, for example, the temperature is too cold or too hot, and pleasant when the temperature is just right.

The painful feeling or pleasant feeling which accompanies body-consciousness and can therefore be called "bodily feeling", is nama, it experiences something; it is different from rupa which does not know anything. Since body-consciousness is vipaka, the accompanying feeling is also vipaka.

Shortly after the body-consciousness has fallen away, there arise in that process javana-cittas which are, if one is not an arahat, kusala citta or akusala citta, and these experience the same object as the body-consciousness. When the javana-cittas are kusala citta, they can be accompanied by happy (mental) feeling, somanassa, or by indifferent feeling, upekkha, and when they are akusala citta, they can be accompanied by happy

(mental) feeling, by indifferent feeling, or by unhappy (mental) feeling, domanassa. These feelings can be called "mental feeling" in order to differentiate them from the feeling which accompanies body-consciousness.

Sometimes we have the idea that painful bodily feeling and domanassa can hardly be separated. However, they are different realities arising because of different conditions. When we burn ourselves with fire, the heat, which is an unpleasant object, impinges on the bodysense and is experienced by body-consciousness which is accompanied by painful bodily feeling. At that moment there is no dislike, the body-consciousness which is vipakacitta merely experiences the unpleasant object. The dosa-mula-citta which is accompanied by domanassa arises later on. It experiences the object with aversion. When sati arises it can be mindful of one reality at a time, and thus, different characteristics of realities can gradually be known. When we try to "catch" realities and desire to know whether the phenomenon which appears is citta, feeling, rupa or any other reality, it is thinking, not mindfulness.

You wrote that you recognize lobha and dosa more easily than seeing or hearing. Can we say that anything is easy? Different realities may present themselves closely one after the other, and when panna is not yet developed, we are bound to confuse them. When there is lobha, it may be accompanied by somanassa. Are we sure of the difference between the characteristics of lobha and somanassa? We cling so much to feeling, to the body and to the other realities that it is difficult to have clear understanding of different characteristics. When there is lobha-mula-citta or dosa-mula-citta there are both nama and rupa. These citta can produce rupas. In the Abhidhamma it is explained that rupa can be produced by four factors: kamma, citta, temperature and nutrition. Can we not notice, for example, that when we are angry there are also rupas arising which are conditioned by dosa-mula-citta? Don't we look different when we are angry or when we are glad? When we are afraid, or when we dislike something we may notice bodily phenomena conditioned by citta. We might have thought that lobha and dosa are easier to recognize, but through the Abhidhamma we learn that it is not easy to distinguish between the different characteristics of realities. We tend to join different realities into a

"whole" and thus we will not know them as they are.

You gave in your letter examples of moments when there was awareness. You write that when walking you are aware of the feeling of pressing the ground.

Is there not thinking of the conventional term "pressing the ground"? Do you picture yourselves as walking? That is a kind of thinking. The object one thinks of at that moment is a concept or idea, not a reality, but the nama which thinks can be object of mindfulness. When you walk different rupas such as

hardness, pressure or motion may appear. There can be mindfulness of one reality at a time, without having to think about it or name it.

You write that when eating you are aware of flavour. There is not only flavour, there is also the nama which experiences the flavour. Do we know the difference already? There can be mindfulness of one reality at a time.

Then you speak of the movement of the jaws when eating. Again, is there not thinking of the conventional term "jaws" instead of being aware of one nama or rupa at a time? When we are more familiar with characteristics of nama and rupa, we will be less inclined to name them or to select them as objects of awareness. There can be direct awareness of their characteristics, although there is bound to be a great deal of thinking in between.

Some people might be inclined to sit and wait for hearing, for sound, for like or dislike to appear. In that way realities will not be known. We can go on with all the things we usually do and we do not have to do anything special in order to have more awareness. For instance, when I am writing, there may be sound, hearing, like, dislike or any other reality appearing.

When moving the hand hardness or motion may appear and these realities can be object of awareness. We should not mind what kind of reality presents itself. In the beginning we may be trying to "catch" the difference between hearing and sound, seeing and visible object, but in that way realities will not be known. Sometimes there is mindfulness of rupa, sometimes of nama, it all depends on the sati.

I am glad to hear that while you talk there is also awareness. One may be inclined to think that it is impossible to be aware while talking, since one has to think of what one is going to say. Now you can prove to yourself that also at such moments there are namas and rupas appearing.

Our life consists of nama and rupa. When we are hungry or when we have a headache there are different kinds of nama and rupa. There is rupa such as hardness, there are namas such as painful bodily feeling, unhappy mental feeling (domanassa), there are many realities. When there is no awareness while we have pain, we think that there is a long moment of pain. When there is mindfulness we can find out that there are many other kinds of nama and rupa presenting themselves, besides the pain caused by the impact on the bodysense. Pain does not stay, it falls away, and then it arises again.

We find it very important whether we like or dislike something. We let ourselves be carried away by our like or dislike instead of being aware of different realities.

We read in the "Kindred Sayings" (IV, Salayatana-vagga, Kindred Sayings on Sense, Third Fifty, Ch III, par. 130, Haliddaka):

Once the venerable Kaccana the Great was staying among the folk of Avanti, at Osprey's Haunt, on a sheer mountain crag.

Then the housefather Haliddakani came to the venerable Kaccana the Great.

Seated at one side he said this:-

It has been said by the Exalted One, sir, "Owing to diversity in elements arises diversity of contact. Owing to diversity of contact arises diversity of feeling". Pray, sir, how far is this so?

Herein, housefather, after having seen a pleasant object with the eye, a monk comes to know as such eye-consciousness that is a pleasant experience.

Owing to contact that is pleasant to experience arises happy feeling.

After having seen with the eye an object that is unpleasant, a monk comes to know as such eye-consciousness that is an unpleasant experience. Owing to contact that is unpleasant to experience arises unhappy feeling.

After having seen with the eye an object that is of indifferent effect, a monk comes to know as such eye-consciousness that experiences an object which is of indifferent effect. Owing to contact that is indifferent to experience arises feeling that is indifferent.

So also, housefather, after having heard a sound with the ear, smelt a scent with the nose, tasted a flavour with the tongue, experienced tangible object with the body, cognized with the mind a mental object, that is pleasant... Owing to contact that is pleasant to experience arises happy feeling. But after having cognized a mental object which is unpleasant ... owing to contact that is unpleasant to experience arises unhappy feeling.

Again, after having cognized with the mind a mental object that is indifferent in effect, he comes to know as such mind-consciousness that experiences an object which is of indifferent effect. Owing to contact that is indifferent arises feeling that is indifferent.

Thus, housefather, owing to diversity in elements arises diversity of contact. Owing to diversity of contact arises diversity of feeling.

We do not come to know seeing, visible object, contact and feeling "as such", merely by thinking about them. Panna should realize the characteristic of seeing when it presents itself; it should realize seeing as nama which arises because of conditions, not self. The nama which sees is different from the rupa which is visible object. When we learn to see realities as elements which arise because of conditions and which we cannot control, we will be less carried away by pleasant or unpleasant objects.

After I had typed the sutta-text I went to a party. When I have typed a text I find that it afterwards reminds me of reality, more so than when I only read the text. And thus, when I was at the party, the text reminded me of the six doors. I saw objects that were pleasing and owing to that pleasant impression happy feeling arose. I saw objects that were displeasing and owing to that unpleasant impression unhappy feeling arose.

There was diversity of elements and so there was diversity of contact and diversity of feeling. My legs were tired and there was hardness which could be experienced. There were speeches and I felt tense, and then there were aversion and hardness which could be experienced. Later on when we received roses, there was a pleasant impression through the eyes. Is it not true that all day long there is diversity of elements, diversity of contact and diversity of feelings?

With metta,

Nina van Gorkom

Letters from Nina

Second Letter

Tokyo

20 April '71.

Dear Friend,

I will repeat your question:

'There is awareness, but not often of characteristics of nama and rupa. How can I get to know directly

characteristics of realities?'

Is there seeing now? It has a characteristic which can be directly experienced. It is a type of nama, not self. It is a reality which experiences visible object through the eye-door.

Is there hearing now? It has a characteristic.

Is there pain now? It has a characteristic.

Is there dosa now? It has a characteristic.

Is there softness now? It has a characteristic.

Is there heat now? It has a characteristic.

A characteristic of nama or rupa is not something besides that which can be experienced now, at this moment. All realities which appear have different characteristics and they can be experienced one at a time. Seeing is nama, visible object is rupa; they have different characteristics.

You wrote that you cannot experience the difference between seeing and thinking about what was seen. You may think that at the moment of seeing there is also thinking about the object you see. When we pay attention to the shape and form of something such as a chair, or a person, there is thinking. But are there not also moments of just experiencing what appears through the eyes? There is not all the time thinking or defining what something is. Of course, in the beginning we cannot yet know realities as they are, but can their characteristics not be experienced now and then?

There are different degrees of knowing characteristics of nama and rupa and when panna has been developed more, they will be known more clearly.

The Buddha explained realities in many different ways so that people would be able to know them as nama-elements and rupa-elements, as not self. We read in the 'Nandakovada-sutta' (Middle Length Sayings, III, no. 146) that

Nandaka, a bhikkhu, had to preach to the nuns. Then the Buddha asked him to repeat to them exactly the same sermon. Why? Their 'faculties' (indriyas 1) were developed and hearing the same sermon again would be the right condition for them to attain the degree of enlightenment for which they were ripe. How could that happen? Could it be just because they were listening and thinking about what they heard, or rather because there would be mindfulness while listening? While listening there could be mindfulness of nama and rupa, of seeing, hearing, thinking or feeling, of any reality appearing through one of the six doors. When I quote what Nandaka said, one may think, 'Is that all?' However, when one listens with mindfulness one can come to know realities as they are. We read:

'What do you think about this, sisters? Is the eye permanent or impermanent?'

'Impermanent, revered sir.'

'But is what is impermanent anguish or happiness?'

'Anguish, revered sir.'

'Is it right to regard that which is impermanent, anguish and liable to alteration as, "This is mine, this am I, this is myself"?''

'No, revered sir.'

What do you think about this, sisters? Is the ear... the nose... the tongue... the bodysense... the mind

permanent or impermanent? ... Is it right to regard that which is impermanent, anguish and liable to alteration as, "This is mine, this am I, this is myself"?

'No, revered sir. What is the reason for this?

Already, revered sir, by means of perfect intuitive wisdom it has been well seen by us as it really is that, "These six internal sense-fields are impermanent." '

The six 'internal sense-fields' are the five senses and the mind-door. The same is said about the six 'external sense-fields' : colours, sounds, smells, flavours, tangibles and mental objects. The same is said about the

'six classes of consciousness' which experience these objects. Then Nandaka said:

'It is good, sisters, it is good. For it is thus, sisters, that by means of perfect intuitive wisdom this is seen by an ariyan disciple as it really is.

It is, sisters, like the oil for lighting an oil-lamp which is impermanent and liable to alteration, and like the wick which is impermanent and liable to alteration, and like the flame which is impermanent and liable to alteration, and like the light which is impermanent and liable to alteration. If anyone, sisters, were to speak thus: " The oil for lighting this oil-lamp is impermanent and liable to alteration, and the wick... and the flame is impermanent and liable to alteration, but that which is the light-- that is permanent, lasting, eternal, not liable to alteration," speaking thus, sisters, would he be speaking rightly?'

'No, revered sir. What is the reason for this?

It is, revered sir, that if the oil for lighting this oil-lamp be impermanent and liable to alteration, and if the wick... and if the flame be impermanent and liable to alteration, all the more is the light impermanent and liable to alteration.'

'Even so, sisters, if anyone should speak thus: "These six internal sense-fields are impermanent and liable to alteration, but whatever pleasure or pain or indifferent feeling I experience as a result of these six internal sense-fields-- that is permanent, lasting, eternal, not liable to alteration," speaking thus, sisters, would he be speaking rightly?'

'No, revered sir. What is the reason for this?

As a result of this or that condition, revered sir, these or those feelings arise. From the stopping of this or that condition these or those feelings are stopped.'

You wrote that awareness helps you to be less involved when unpleasant things happen. When there are conditions for sati and panna we are not taken in by the objects which present themselves through the six doors. However, there are many moments of forgetfulness of realities. For instance, when feelings are intense, we tend to take them for self, we find it very difficult to see them as only conditioned realities.

At times we have unpleasant experiences and there is akusala vipaka through eyes, ears, nose, tongue or bodysense. The other day someone hit me, meaning it as a joke. Feeling the impact of it was akusala vipaka through the bodysense. Why, why did this have to happen? At such moments one may be upset and there is no awareness. Of course, I know why it happened: it was akusala vipaka, the result of akusala kamma. Thus we see that everything we have to experience are only conditioned realities, and also our like or dislike of what happens, and our feelings, are only conditioned realities.

Our attachment or dislike are not vipaka, they arise with akusala cittas which are conditioned by our accumulated defilements. There are different types of conditions which play their part in our life.

Now I shall continue with the sutta. Nandaka said further on:

'It is good, sisters, it is good. For it is thus, sisters, that by means of perfect intuitive wisdom this is seen by an ariyan disciple as it really is.

It is, sisters, as if a clever cattle-butcher or cattle-butcher's apprentice, having killed a cow, should dissect the cow with a butcher's sharp knife without spoiling the flesh within, without spoiling the outer hide, and with the butcher's sharp knife should cut, should cut around, should cut all around whatever tendons, sinews and ligaments there are within; and having cut, cut around, cut all around and removed the outer hide and, having clothed that cow in that self-same hide again, should then speak thus: " This cow is conjoined with this hide as before." Speaking thus, sisters, would he be speaking rightly?'

'No, revered sir.What is the reason for this?

Although, revered sir, that clever cattle-butcher or cattle-butcher's apprentice, having killed a cow... having clothed that cow in that self-same hide again, might then speak thus: "This cow is conjoined with this hide as before," yet that cow is not conjoined with that hide.'

'I have made this simile for you, sisters, so as to illustrate the meaning.

This is the meaning here: "the flesh within" sisters, is a synonym for the six internal sense-fields. "The outer hide", sisters, is a synonym for the six external sense-fields. "The tendons, sinews and ligaments within", sisters, is a synonym for delight and attachment. "The butcher's sharp knife", sisters, is a synonym for the ariyan intuitive wisdom, the ariyan intuitive wisdom by which one cuts, cuts around, cuts all around the inner defilements, the inner fetters and the inner bonds.'

After Nandaka had finished his sermon and the nuns had departed, the Buddha said to the monks: '...although these nuns were delighted with Nandaka's teaching on Dhamma, their aspirations were not fulfilled.'

We then read:

Then the Lord addressed the venerable Nandaka, saying: 'Well then, Nandaka, you may exhort these nuns with this same exhortation again tomorrow.'

We read that after Nandaka had spoken the same sermon to the nuns for the second time, the Buddha said:

'...these nuns were delighted with Nandaka's teaching on Dhamma and their aspirations were fulfilled. She who is the last nun 2 of these five hundred nuns is a stream-attainer (sotapanna), not liable to the Downfall; she is assured, bound for self-awakening.'

You might think that the nuns had understood the impermanence of conditioned realities already the first time, but there are many degrees of realizing the truth. Because of Nandaka's sermon, which he repeated, there was a condition for those who had not attained enlightenment to become sotapanna, and for others who were already ariyan saints to attain higher stages of enlightenment in so far as they were ripe for it.

Thus we can see that listening to the teachings or reading them are conditions for mindfulness and the development of panna, and even for attaining enlightenment.

In the above quoted sutta we read about the dissecting of a cow. When we join realities together into a 'whole', we take for 'something', for 'self'.

We are not taken in by objects which are 'dissected' into elements, that is, when panna realizes visible object as rupa, not self; hardness as rupa, not self; hearing as nama, not self, and so on as to the other realities presenting themselves through the six doors.

After I had typed the text about dissecting the cow, my husband and I were having dinner. While we were

eating I was still busy 'dissecting the cow'. I liked the food and I remembered the words of the sutta that we are bound by delight and attachment. We are all bound by these ' tendons', but wisdom can cut them away. This sutta was a condition for me to be mindful of different namas and rupas which appeared.

We are bound by attachment and delight with regard to what is experienced through the six doors:

We like savours--tasting-- we want to go on tasting,

We like visible object--seeing-- we want to go on seeing,

We like sound--hearing-- we want to go on hearing,

We like thought -- thinking-- we want to go on thinking.

Thus there are conditions to go on in the cycle of birth and death. It is because of craving that we must be reborn. There will be the arising of nama and rupa in other existences, again and again.

Why did the nuns have to hear the same sermon again? Hearing it only once was not enough. I would need to hear it again and again, many more times. I still cling to the internal sense-fields and to the external sense-fields.

That is why it is necessary to be aware of seeing, colour, hearing, sound, of all namas and rupas which appear through the six doors, over and over again, without preference for any reality. Their characteristics have to be realized over and over again, so that panna will know them as they are. Thus we are busy, dissecting the cow.

You asked me how we can realize the conditions of nama and rupa through being aware of them, and whether that is different from thinking about conditions.

There are different degrees of understanding conditions. First one should have intellectual understanding of conditions. Eye-sense, for example, is a condition for seeing, since it is the physical place of origin, the base

(vatthu) of seeing. Without eye-sense there cannot be seeing. Visible object is a condition for seeing by being its object. Seeing is vipaka-citta, it is produced by kamma. Kamma-condition is another type of condition. There are different types of conditions for the phenomena which arise.

Theoretical understanding of conditions is not the same as panna which discerns the conditions of the nama and rupa which appear. This is a stage of insight which cannot arise before the beginning stage of insight which is: panna which clearly distinguishes between the characteristic of nama and the characteristic of rupa, thus, which knows nama as nama and rupa as rupa.

Seeing is a reality which knows visible object through the eye-door, it is not self but nama. There is no need to think about this. Can the characteristic of seeing not be known when it appears? Seeing is different from visible object. Visible object is a rupa which can be experienced through the eye-door, it does not know anything. Hearing is a reality which knows sound through the ear-door, it is different from sound, a rupa which can be experienced through the ear-door. Panna can come to realize that not a self, not a person sees or hears, but nama, and that nama is different from rupa.

Panna can also come to realize that nama and rupa arise because of conditions, not without conditions. A higher stage of insight has been reached when panna directly discerns the conditions of the nama and rupa which appear.

Someone thought that knowing the conditions for dosa (aversion) would help to eliminate it. He thought that knowing the conditions means thinking about the circumstances, the 'story'. However, that is not panna which realizes conditions, it is thinking about a 'story', about concepts. And is there not an idea of '

my dosa' about which one thinks?

How can one know dosa as it really is, since that is the only way to eventually eliminate it? It should be known as nama, not self, arising because of conditions. Not only dosa should be known as it is, but all realities which appear through the six doors. As regards dosa, the real cause of aversion or anger is not the circumstances, not the other people, but our accumulations of dosa. Dosa is not self, but a conditioned reality.

Thus we can see that in thinking about the story, about the circumstances, we do not come to know more about dosa. We have accumulations to think a great deal. When there is thinking about dosa, the thinking can be realized as nama, not self.

Ignorance of realities can never be eradicated by merely thinking about them. The Buddha spoke time and again about realities appearing through the six doors in order to remind us to be aware of them. In this way panna will know them as they are and ignorance and wrong view of realities can be eradicated.

We read in the 'Kindred Sayings' (IV, Salayatana-Vagga, Second Fifty, Ch I, par. 53, Ignorance):

Then a certain monk came to the Exalted One, and on coming to him saluted him and sat down at one side. So seated that monk said this:

'By how knowing, lord, by how seeing does ignorance vanish and knowledge arise?'

'In him that knows and sees the eye as impermanent, monk, ignorance vanishes and knowledge arises. In him that knows and sees objects...seeing-consciousness, ...the ear...sounds...hearing-consciousness,... the nose...smells...smelling-consciousness..., the tongue...flavours... tasting-consciousness..., the body... touches...body-consciousness,...the mind...mindstates... mind-consciousness,... as impermanent, ignorance vanishes and knowledge arises.

With metta,

Nina van Gorkom

Footnote 1: The indriyas are here, in this context: faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom.

Footnote 2: With the least attainment

Letters from Nina

Third Letter

The Hague, March, '77

Dear Mr. Walter,

Thank you for your letter. First of all, I will repeat your remarks on

Buddhism, and then comment on them.

'I am rooted in the Christian culture and tradition and therefore I find the world of Buddhism a world which is strange to me. I have only an academic interest in Buddhism, but I believe that Buddhism may help me to know myself better. What I do not like is the idea of self-redemption in Buddhism.'

Yes, of course we are rooted in the tradition and culture in which we have been brought up. It is natural that we feel at home with what is familiar to us. The Buddha's teachings do not require one to give up his tradition and culture, his likes and dislikes. Through the Buddhist teachings there will be more

understanding of the conditions for our actions, speech and thoughts, more understanding of the causes of pleasant and unpleasant experiences. We do not have to try to change our life, but, through the

Buddhist teachings there can be more understanding of it.

I understand that you do not like the idea of 'self-redemption'. We cannot be redeemed by anyone. We cannot be redeemed by a 'self' either, but it is right understanding which can make us more free, less enslaved to our many defilements. The Buddha showed us the Path leading to the end of defilements. We follow this Path in developing right understanding of all phenomena in and around ourselves.

When you see that the Buddha's teachings can help us to know ourselves, you may no longer think of these teachings as belonging to a particular culture which you find strange. You may think it worth while to find out whether these teachings can help you directly, now, in your daily life.

Many religions teach that one should love one's fellowmen, but do we know how to develop this kind of love? Do we know what unselfish love is and when it occurs? I think that it is important to know more clearly what unselfish love is. Don't we often mistake attachment for unselfish love? We can delude ourselves when we do not know what unselfish love is. When it seems that we perform a deed of pure generosity there may also be many selfish thoughts.

Through the Buddha's teachings we learn to distinguish between different mental qualities. When there is pure generosity we think of the wellbeing of others and there is no selfishness. Whereas, when there is attachment we wish for our own wellbeing and gain. Unselfish love is wholesome and attachment is not wholesome. At one moment there may be unselfish love, but shortly afterwards there may be moments of selfishness. There is not one consciousness which stays, but there are many different moments of consciousness, arising one at a time and succeeding one another.

We do not possess something like unselfish love. It may arise and then it falls away immediately, to be followed by the next moment of consciousness which is different again. Moments of consciousness change so quickly that we do not notice it if we have not developed right understanding of the present moment. It seems that unselfish love can stay, but in reality it falls away immediately as soon as it has arisen.

When we have affection towards other people there may be moments that we genuinely think of their wellbeing, but such moments do not stay, they fall away and then selfish attachment may arise. There are many forms and degrees of attachment: it may be coarse such as greed or covetousness, but it can also be more subtle clinging which we do not notice.

Parents may think that they have nothing but unselfish love for their children, but is this true? They may have a selfish attitude towards their children and consider them as 'mine'. They may be attached to their own pleasant feeling they derive from being in the company of their children. It may be difficult to understand that attachment is not wholesome, because many forms of attachment are generally in society considered as good, provided one does not harm other people. When attachment is as intense as greed or covetousness and it motivates bad deeds, people will agree that it is harmful. But when we are attached to people, to beautiful things or to agreeable surroundings, it may be difficult to see that also such kinds of attachment are not wholesome. However, one may understand that attachment, be it coarse or more subtle, is in any case different from a moment of genuine generosity, when there is no selfish thought.

Attachment is deeply rooted in us, it arises time and again. It is useful to know also the moments of more subtle attachment. When we see a pleasant sight or hear a beautiful sound, attachment to what we see or hear is bound to arise immediately. It is beyond control, because it has its appropriate conditions for its arising. We are attached to pleasant objects today, because we were attached in the past. Our attachment today conditions the arising of attachment in the future.

Attachment brings sorrow. We like particular events in our life to take place, we want to be with people we like, we want to see and hear pleasant things. However, when things do not turn out the way we want

them to be and we have to be separated from people or things we like, there is displeasure or aversion, there may even be anger. This is conditioned by attachment.

Wholesome qualities do not harm us, they do not make us sad or disturbed.

What is unwholesome brings sorrow.

The moments of consciousness which are wholesome and those which are unwholesome arise at different moments, but these moments can arise closely one after the other. I find it very helpful to know these different moments so that I will not delude myself. When I, for instance, help others for a whole morning, it is good to know that there was not generosity all the time, that there were also attachment and aversion. We may approve of our own good deeds and we may find ourselves important. We want to be popular, we do not want to be overlooked by others. We may expect something in return for our good deeds, such as words of praise. At those moments there is no generosity, we think of ourselves. Also aversion may arise while we are helping others. There are many forms and degrees of aversion: it may be coarse such as anger or hate, or it may be more subtle such as a slight displeasure or uneasiness which we may hardly notice. We are bound to have aversion when something does not go as smoothly as we want to, and does this not happen time and again? Aversion may arise when we feel a little tired while we exert ourselves, even while we are helping others. The Buddha's teachings help us to know also the more subtle degrees of unwholesomeness.

We may find Buddhism too intellectual. It may seem that we have to force ourselves to follow all our different moments of consciousness and that we could not live in a natural way. This is not so. We do not try to change anything which occurs, we could not anyway, since all phenomena arise because of their appropriate conditions. We need not try not to feel close to other people, not to have affection for them, but we can develop a clearer understanding of the different phenomena of our life. It is better to know that one is not wholesome all the time than not to know, to delude oneself.

The Buddha taught what is wholesome and what is not wholesome.

Non-attachment or generosity is wholesome. Non-hate or kindness is wholesome. Wisdom is wholesome. These are the three 'roots' of wholesomeness. There are three 'roots' of evil: attachment or clinging, aversion or anger and ignorance. We may be used to thinking in terms of sin.

However, unwholesomeness is not exactly what in society is meant by 'sin'.

Even when one does not do an evil deed there can still be unwholesome consciousness. Also attachment or aversion which is more subtle is unwholesome, it is not beneficial. As we have seen, there are different degrees of unwholesomeness.

We are so ignorant about ourselves that we do not know whether this very moment is wholesome or not wholesome. Is there attachment now? Do we like what we see? Or is there aversion? If there is a slight feeling of uneasiness or tiredness there is bound to be aversion. Gradually we can develop more knowledge of the present moment. This is the only way to know oneself.

Our life consists of ever-changing phenomena which are beyond control. One may find it difficult to understand what the Buddha meant, when he taught that there is no self. Our clinging to the self is so deeply rooted. We would like to be master of our body, we would like to be master of our moments of consciousness, our feelings, all our experiences. However, one can see that the body consists of changing phenomena. We cannot control the body, we cannot prevent its decay. What we call mind changes all the time.

We would like to be kind and wise all the time but instead we are often attached, unkind and ignorant of realities. We would like to hear kind words from other people, but instead we may hear harsh words, or people may treat us badly. We would like to have only pleasant experiences but this is impossible. Consequently we tend to feel frustrated and even bitter. The seeing of pleasant and unpleasant objects, the

hearing of pleasant or unpleasant sounds, all our experiences are phenomena which arise because of their appropriate conditions, we are not master of them. Instead of blaming other people when life is not as we want it to be, instead of giving way to feelings of frustration, there could be development of right understanding of the phenomena of our life.

The Buddha taught us to be aware of the phenomena which occur at the present moment, no matter they are wholesome or unwholesome, pleasant or unpleasant.

This is the only way to have less clinging to an idea of 'self' which tries to control life, to have less clinging to 'my feelings', 'my thoughts', 'my body', and is this not a gain?

Kind regards from

Nina van Gorkom

Letters from Nina

Fourth Letter

The Hague, March '79.

Dear Maud,

You asked me whether the Buddha's teachings could console our friend Ina, who lost her husband and who has to bring up her children all by herself.

The Buddha's teachings can help us to have right understanding about life and death. What is life? Why must we die? We make ourselves believe that life is pleasant, but there are many moments of pain and sickness, sorrow and grief. And inevitably there is death.

Everything which arises must fall away, it cannot stay. We are born and therefore we have to die. The body does not disintegrate only at the moment of death, there is decay each moment. We notice that we have become older when we see a photograph taken some time ago. But the change which is noticeable after some time proves that there is change at each moment.

There are many phenomena taking place in our body and they change each moment. Temperature changes: we feel sometimes hot, sometimes cold. We feel motion or pressure in our body time and again. What we take for 'our body' are many different elements which arise and then fall away, but we are so ignorant that we do not notice it. The Buddha reminds us that our body is like a corpse, because it is disintegrating, decaying each moment. Our body does not belong to us but we cling to it, we are ignorant of the truth.

We may understand intellectually that the body does not really exist and that it is only physical elements which change all the time. However, intellectual understanding is thinking, and thinking, even if it is right thinking, cannot eradicate wrong understanding of reality. We should learn to experience the truth directly.

Can we experience the body as it really is? Let us for a while forget about our theoretical knowledge of the body and ask ourselves whether there is not a bodily phenomenon now, which we can experience directly, without having to think about it. While we are sitting or walking, is there no hardness? Can it be experienced now? Is there no heat or cold? Can it be experienced now, just for a moment, without having to think about it? These are physical elements which can be directly experienced, one at a time, through the bodysense.

There are many different kinds of elements. The element which is solidity can be directly experienced as hardness or softness, when it appears through the bodysense. Bodysense is all over the body. In order to

experience hardness and softness, we do not have to think of the place where they appear.

Temperature is another physical phenomenon, an element which can be directly experienced. It can be experienced as heat or cold when it appears through the bodysense. There is change of temperature time and again. Is there not sometimes heat, sometimes cold? We do not have to think about it in order to experience it.

I have given only a few examples of bodily phenomena, (physical elements which constitute the body). These examples may help us to see that all the

Buddha taught can be proven, through direct experience. Knowledge which is developed through direct experience is clearer than theoretical knowledge.

The knowledge acquired through direct experience is the wisdom the Buddha taught his disciples to develop, so that all ignorance and clinging can be eradicated.

Not only bodily elements arise and fall away, also what we call mind arises and falls away, each moment. There is not a mind or a soul which 'exists', there is only a moment of consciousness now, and this falls away to be succeeded by the next moment. There may be thinking now, but it falls away to be succeeded by the next moment. Don't we think then of this, then of that? Thinking never stays the same. Can we control our thinking? Now we may have attachment, then aversion, then a moment of generosity. Is there generosity all the time? It falls away and very closely afterwards there may be pride, or stinginess.

What we call mind are many different elements which arise and then fall away immediately. There is actually birth and death of consciousness, time and again, all through life. Thus, we may understand that what we call in conventional language 'dying' is in fact not different from what takes place each moment of our life.

The Buddha and the disciples who had attained supreme perfect enlightenment felt no grief about anything, whatever happened to them. We have not attained enlightenment and thus we feel deep grief when those who are dear to us die, and at times we think with fear of our own death.

Does the Buddha have a message for us who are only beginners on his Path?

The Buddha has a message for all those who are afflicted by grief and are disturbed by the thought of death. He teaches us to develop clear comprehension of the present moment.

The wisdom the Buddha taught to develop is knowledge acquired from direct experience of the physical elements and mental elements of which our life consists. Mental elements are moments of consciousness, feelings and other mental qualities such as anger and attachment.

We can have clear knowledge only of what occurs at the present moment, not of what is past already. Is there hardness now? That is only a physical element. Is there no heat or cold now? These are only physical elements. Is there pleasant feeling now? That is only a mental element. Is there dislike of something now? That is only a mental element.

We are not used to considering the world in us and around us as elements.

Someone may be inclined to say "How can this kind of understanding help me now? It will not return to me my husband or wife, my child or my friend who have died. It will not alleviate my bodily pain, it cannot make me healthy again."

When we learn to see realities as elements which do not belong to us and which are beyond control, there will be less ignorance in our life. We will suffer less from the adversities of life.

We still have sorrow, but we should know sorrow as it is. Sorrow or grief is a kind of aversion, it is

dislike of something we experience. It is natural that we feel grief. It is bound to arise when there are conditions for it.

We had aversion in the past and this conditions the arising of aversion today. Ignorance of realities conditions everything which is unwholesome and thus also aversion. Aversion is also conditioned by attachment. We are attached to the pleasant feeling we have when we are in the company of someone who is dear to us. When that person isn't there any more we have grief. Thus, it is actually a selfish clinging to our own pleasant feeling which conditions grief. This may sound crude, but if we are sincere to ourselves we can see that it is true.

When we know more about the conditions for grief, we can understand that grief is only a mental element. Grief does not last, it falls away as soon as it has arisen. It may arise again, but then it is a different moment of grief. When we learn to see grief as a conditioned phenomenon, we will think less in terms of 'my grief', and thus we will be less overpowered by it. Our life consists not only of grief, there are many other realities which arise.

When there is, for example, seeing or hearing, there cannot be grief at the same time.

When we learn to know the present moment, we will worry less about the past.

What has happened, has happened already, how can we change it now? What can be done now is the development of right understanding of the present moment.

We read in one of the 'Jatakas', the Birthstories of the Bodhisatta, in the

'Birthstory about Desire' (Kama Jataka, no. 467 3) about grief, conditioned by clinging. In the commentary to this story we read that a brahmin cultivated corn with the greatest care. He had the intention to give alms to the Buddha and his disciples when it was ripe. However, the night before he was to reap it, a great flood of rain carried away the whole crop. The brahmin pressed his hand to his heart, because he was overcome with grief, went home weeping and lay down lamenting. The Buddha came in order to console him and said: 'Why, will what is lost come back when you grieve?'

The Brahmin answered: 'No, Gotama, that will not.' The Buddha then said:

If that is so, why grieve? The wealth of beings in this world, or their corn, when they have it, they have it, and when it is gone, why, it is gone. There is no composite thing that is not subject to destruction; do not brood over it.'

After the Buddha's discourse the brahmin could see realities as they are and attained enlightenment. The Buddha said that he had also in a former life, when he was still a Bodhisatta, cured this brahmin of grief. The brahmin was then a king who was very greedy for power. He wanted to possess many kingdoms. When he did not obtain three cities which were promised to him, he became sick of grief. The Bodhisatta explained to him that those who are greedy want to have more and more and are never satisfied. He cured the brahmin of his sickness by words of wisdom. He said:

'What, O King! Can you capture those cities by grieving?'

When the king answered that he could not, the Bodhisatta said:

'Since that is so, why grieve, O great King? Every thing, animate or inanimate, must pass away, and leave all behind, even its own body...'

We read that the Bodhisatta also said:

'For each desire that is let go a happiness is won:

He that all happiness would have, must with all lust have done.'

With metta,

Nina van Gorkom

Footnote 3: Published by the Pali Text Society.

Part 11

Letters from Nina

Fifth Letter

The Hague, 15 February, '81

Dear Students in Penang,

You requested me to write about Dhamma as it can be applied in daily life.

We may ask ourselves about our goal in life. We all want happiness, but what is it? Can we find true happiness in life? Pleasant things we enjoy are susceptible to change, they are impermanent. We do not really see the impermanence of what is in ourselves and around ourselves, we cling to what is impermanent. We are slaves of the vicissitudes of life. One day we are praised and then we are glad. The next day we are treated unjustly and we are humiliated, and then we are sad. There are alternately gain and loss, fame and obscurity, praise and blame, contentment and pain. These are the eight 'worldly conditions' in our life.

We read in the 'Gradual Sayings' (Book of the Eights, Ch I, par. 6) that the Buddha spoke to the monks about the eight worldly conditions which obsess the world. He spoke with regard to those who have not attained enlightenment:

... Monks, gain comes to the unlearned common average folk, who reflect not thus: "This gain which has come is impermanent, painful and subject to change." They know it not as it really is. Loss comes ... fame... obscurity... blame... praise... contentment... pain.... They reflect not that such are impermanent, painful and subject to change, nor do they know these conditions as they really are. Gain, loss and so forth take possession of their minds and hold sway there. They welcome the gain which has arisen; they rebel against loss. They welcome the fame which has arisen; they rebel against obscurity. They welcome the praise which has arisen; they rebel against blame. They welcome the contentment which has arisen; they rebel against pain. Thus given over to compliance and hostility, they are not freed from birth, old age, death, sorrows, lamentations, pains, miseries and tribulations. I say such people are not free from ill.

We then read that for the 'ariyan disciple', who has attained enlightenment, the opposite is the case. He sees things as they really are and is not enslaved to the worldly conditions. Could we become an ariyan disciple as well? At this moment we are still 'unlearned, common, average folk'. We do not see things as they are, but we live with our dreams and fantasies. In order to see things as they are, we should know the difference between what is real and what is not real.

We may wonder whether the Buddha's teaching is not a philosophical system which deals with abstractions. On the contrary, the Buddha's teaching helps us to know ourselves, to know our different moments of wholesomeness and unwholesomeness. He taught the way to eradicate attachment, aversion and ignorance.

Our thinking about reality is conditioned by many ideas we acquired through our education and through

the culture in which we are rooted. If we want to understand what the Buddha taught we should not hold on to our own ideas about reality and we should be open-minded to his teaching. Then we will notice that his teaching is completely different from our ideas about reality.

The Buddha taught about everything which appears now and which can be directly experienced. He did not teach abstract ideas. What appears now? Is it attachment, aversion or ignorance? Or is it generosity or compassion? In our life there are wholesome moments and unwholesome moments and these change very rapidly. We do not have one consciousness or mind, but many different moments of consciousness (cittas). When we, for example, perform a good deed there are wholesome moments of consciousness, but also unwholesome moments of consciousness may arise. Some slight stinginess may arise, which we only know ourselves and which nobody else may notice. There may be attachment to the person to whom we give something, or there may be conceit. If we do not know when there is a wholesome moment of consciousness (kusala citta) and when there is an unwholesome moment of consciousness (akusala citta) how could we develop wholesomeness?

Through the development of right understanding of the different moments of consciousness we will better know our own defilements and then we will see that the cause of all sadness and misery is within ourselves and not outside ourselves.

What are realities and what are imaginations? We use in our language words in order to make ourselves understood. However, we should know that a word sometimes denotes something which is real, which can be directly experienced, now, and that sometimes a word denotes an abstract idea. We should find out what the Buddha taught about reality, otherwise we will continue to be ignorant of what occurs in ourselves and around ourselves.

And then it will be impossible to eradicate defilements.

Moments of consciousness are not imagination, they are realities which can be directly experienced, at this moment. We can come to know our good and bad qualities when they appear. We have attachment or aversion with regard to what we experience through the eyes, the ears, and through the other senses. The experiences through the senses are realities. Seeing or hearing are not imagination. Before like or dislike on account of what we see arises, there must be a moment of just seeing. Is there seeing at this moment? It can be experienced, it is a reality. Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, experiences through the bodysense and through the mind are different moments of consciousness which can be known when they appear.

Seeing is the experience of what presents itself through the eyes, of visible object or colour. Seeing is different from thinking of what we see.

Hearing is the experience of what presents itself through the ears, of sound. Hearing is different from thinking about what we hear. Thus, there are many different moments of consciousness which experience different objects.

Sound is a reality which presents itself time and again. Sound can be directly experienced, but sound itself does not know anything, it is different from hearing. Flavour can be experienced by tasting-consciousness, but flavour itself does not know anything. It is different from tasting-consciousness.

There are two kinds of phenomena in our life:

the reality which knows or experiences something, nama,

the reality which does not know anything, rupa.

Generosity, kindness, aversion, seeing or hearing are mental phenomena or namas, they experience different objects. Sound, flavour, hardness, softness, heat or cold are physical phenomena or rupas, they do not know anything.

Everything which is real can be directly experienced through the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, the bodysense and the mind-door, thus, through six doorways. If we want to know whether something is real we should ask ourselves: can it be directly experienced and through which of the six doorways?

Namas and rupas are realities which can be experienced without there being the need to call them by a name or to think about them. Hearing is hearing for everybody, everywhere. We can give hearing another name, but the reality is the same. Sound is sound for everybody, everywhere. We can give sound another name but the reality is the same. Attachment is attachment for everybody, aversion is aversion for everybody. We can change their names, but the realities are the same.

There can be only one moment of consciousness at a time and it experiences one object. We may be inclined to think that namas can last for a while. We may believe that thinking, for example, can last for some time. What we take for a long moment of thinking are in reality many moments and they think of only one object at a time. Seeing is another moment of consciousness and it experiences only one object: that which appears through the eyes, visible object. After seeing there can be thinking of what we have seen, or there can be hearing; these are all different moments.

The Buddha taught that only one nama or rupa can be known at a time, when it appears through one of the six doors. We may understand this in theory, but now we have to prove this through the practice. This is not easy since we cling to our own ideas about reality.

Once I was having lunch with Khun Sujin, my good friend in the Dhamma, in a

Chinese restaurant in Bangkok. I was served a duck's foot and when I looked at it I had aversion. Khun Sujin said: 'Just taste it, try it, without paying attention to the shape and form'. I tasted it without paying attention to the shape and form. The taste was good. At that time I did not understand yet the full meaning of Khun Sujin's lesson, but she wanted to show me that the experience through the eyes is one thing, and the experience through the tongue quite another thing and thus another reality.

We join all the different experiences together and we think, 'I am eating a duck's foot'. Duck's foot is a concept of a 'whole' we form up in our mind, but it cannot be directly experienced through one of the six doors. We think of concepts time and again, but we should not forget that there are also realities which can be experienced, one at a time. For example:

there is the experience of visible object,

there is visible object,

there is attention to the shape and form and this is different from seeing,

there is aversion,

there is tasting, the experience of flavour,

there is flavour,

there is thinking of the flavour.

Gradually we may learn to distinguish between different realities and recognize them when they appear one at a time. Then we shall come to understand more clearly the difference between realities which can be directly experienced and concepts of 'wholes' we can think of but which do not have characteristics which can be directly experienced. I thought that I could see a duck's foot and I failed to understand that there are only different elements which can be experienced one at a time. Realities which can be directly experienced, one at a time, are called 'absolute realities' or 'ultimate realities' (paramattha dhammas). They are not abstract ideas, they appear all the time in daily life.

All realities which arise have to fall away, they are impermanent. We know that people once have to die and that also inanimate things cannot last forever. However, we do not really know that there is impermanence at each moment. A thing such as a cup seems to stay the same for some time, but in reality it consists of physical elements, rupas, which arise and fall away all the time. Rupas are replaced so long as there are conditions for it, a cup at this moment is not the same as a cup a moment ago.

In daily life we need conventional realities such as a cup we use for drinking. However, if we pay attention only to conventional realities the impermanence of phenomena will never be directly known and then we will continue to be enslaved to the 'worldly conditions'.

We can lead our daily life, talk to people, use all the tools we need, think about conventional realities, but at the same time right understanding of nama-elements and rupa-elements can be developed. The arising and falling away at each moment of a 'whole' such as a cup cannot be directly experienced, since a cup is a concept existing in our thoughts. When we touch a cup hardness is a rupa-element which can be directly experienced, through the body-door. The arising and falling away of hardness can be directly known by right understanding when it is more developed. That kind of understanding which knows impermanence not merely through thinking can effectively lead to detachment from realities.

The realization of the arising and falling away of namas and rupas is a later stage of the development of understanding. First there is thinking about the different characteristics of nama and rupa and then one starts to recognize them when they appear. Gradually one learns to be aware of their characteristics one at a time. One should remember that also awareness is a mental phenomenon which arises and falls away and does not belong to a self who could control it.

We cannot expect there to be many moments of awareness or mindfulness in the beginning, but at the moment there is awareness of a reality right understanding of that characteristic of reality can develop. My husband and

I had been invited to a restaurant where it was very cold. I had aversion towards the cold and I was inclined to say something about it. But I found that this is impatience and lack of consideration for our host and hostess.

I considered that the namas and rupas which arise are beyond control. They arise when there are conditions for their arising. We are always inclined to think that a self or person can be master of nama and rupa. Sometimes it seems that we can, but in reality it is not so. The experience of bodily ease or pain belongs to the eight 'worldly conditions' we are not master of.

However, also when we do not feel well or when we are cold, awareness of realities can arise. There can be awareness of cold so that it can be known as it is: only a rupa which can be experienced through the bodysense. Then there is at that moment no notion of 'my feet' or 'the cold draught', which are not realities in the absolute sense but concepts we can think of. After a moment of mindfulness of a reality there will be moments of thinking of concepts. Thinking is real, it arises because there are conditions for its arising. There can be awareness of thinking so that it can be known as a kind of nama. When we remember the disadvantages of the eight 'worldly conditions' we can be urged to develop right understanding of realities.

This will help us most of all to be more patient amidst the vicissitudes of life.

With Metta,

Nina van Gorkom

Letters from Nina

Sixth Letter

June 28th, '82.

Jakarta.

Dear Blanche,

Thank you for your letter in which you explain why you think mindfulness in daily life is too difficult and why you think one should first achieve one-pointedness and calm before there can be any insight. It is a point one often hears and I think it may be of some use also to others if I bring up this point again for discussion for my other friends.

You write about mindfulness of all the *namas* and *rupas* of our daily life, such as seeing, visible object, hearing, sound, etc.:

Madame Sujin devised it for very busy people like yourselves who perhaps are constantly bombarded and beset by this type of stimulants. The mind, in these cases, must be overly busy and strained sometimes with overwork and its many official and unofficial duties and responsibilities with, of course, very little time to sit in restful, relaxing meditation.

You then continue and state that calm or pervasion of the mind is a rest so needed by the mind, and that calm must be cultivated through meditation.

About the business of life, I do not think it makes any difference whether one is rushing to social functions, one's relatives, or looking at the purple mountains, or sitting crosslegged in a meditation room. Our thoughts are always busy, one falling away, the next one arising. Even while one is

'alone', one is not really alone when there is still attachment which arises more often than one would ever have thought. When one is honest, is it not true that one always lives with one's thoughts, one's dreams, one's hopes and expectations? 'Self' is important, one wants the self to be successful, even in meditation and calm.

What is that calm then, so much sought after? Is it the true calm which is freedom from attachment, aversion and ignorance? Or is it a subtle attachment to relaxation? Attachment can blind us so much. How can we know whether there is the right calm or only what we take for calm? How can one check? Can we check whether there is attachment at this very moment? If we cannot check this now, how could we check it later on? The test is at this moment. There are many moments of seeing and then, very often, attachment to details and outlines, to concepts, even when we do not think of wishing. We like to see the familiar things around us, that is attachment already.

Is there an idea of 'I see', 'I think', deep-rooted in us? Does seeing seem to last for a while? When there are wrong ideas about seeing how otherwise but through mindfulness of seeing when there is seeing could wrong view be corrected? Does it seem that we see people and things? Do they seem to last?

Is there any other way to correct this wrong view but knowing the characteristic of visible object when it appears, of knowing the characteristic of thinking when it appears, of knowing all realities as they appear, one at a time? Should we not know the difference between seeing and thinking of concepts such as people or trees? Seeing and thinking are different *cittas* arising at different moments and they experience different objects. They arise and then fall away immediately, they do not last.

Are we inclined to think that it is too difficult to develop right understanding of realities in daily life because there is no immediate result of our development? Then one may be tempted to look for some other way, different from the development of right understanding in daily life.

Are we not always finding excuses not to develop it in daily life?

It is actually because of our defilements that it is hard to develop right understanding. If we cling to

immediate results we will make it even harder.

Why don't we have the patience to develop understanding little by little, starting at this very moment? There are realities all the time and at least we can begin. We cannot expect to have full understanding at once of seeing, hearing etc. But what does that matter? When one is only intent on the present moment one does not worry about the many lives one still has to live in order to have full understanding. And anyway, we do not have understanding, it is understanding which develops and understands. I do not see any other way in order to know that it is the seeing which sees, not self. That it is the hearing which hears, not self. That it is the thinking which thinks, not self. There is no other way but knowing their characteristics when they appear. If one tries to concentrate on such realities, or thinks about them, or tries to direct phenomena there is thinking about stories and concepts but not the direct experience of the realities which appear. When we think of seeing, the characteristic of seeing cannot be directly experienced. And we shall keep on living in the world of thoughts only, with lobha, dosa and moha (attachment, aversion and ignorance).

It is good to remember that the Buddha repeated that it is 'no easy matter' to attain full knowledge. We read in the 'Kindred Sayings' (II, Ch XXI,

Kindred Saying about Brethren, par. 6, 11,12) about different monks who attained arahatship. We read that the Buddha said about Kappina: (par. 11):

.... That monk is highly gifted, monks, of wondrous power. No easy matter is it to win that which he formerly had not won, even that for the sake of which clansmen rightly leave the home for the homeless, even that uttermost goal of the divine living which he has attained, wherein he abides, having come just here and now to know it thoroughly for himself and to realize it.

The Buddha would not repeatedly say that it is no easy matter if there were some other way of developing which would be easier. There is ignorance of all realities which appear; ignorance is deeply accumulated and thus, how could it be easy to get rid of it?

In the Buddha's time there were many monks who had accumulations for jhana (absorption), and also the Buddha himself, when he was still a Bodhisatta had developed it, but he had found that this was not the way to enlightenment. When someone has accumulations for calm, what should he do? He should know the characteristic of calm as not self, as impermanent. Thus, he should see it as only a reality which arises because of conditions. And when there are conditions for akusala citta, also that characteristic should be known as not self. The

Buddha did not say that one should first develop calm; this depends on one's accumulations. And then, if one thinks that one has accumulations for calm, right understanding has to be very keen and sharp in order to know whether there is not a subtle attachment to self who is so calm. One can be misled one's whole life.

As regards the persons who are our teachers, one can listen to different teachers, but finally we have to decide for ourselves which way we wish to go in life. I have never liked the idea of obedience to a teacher. The Buddha said that there is no refuge outside, only the development of satipatthana can be one's refuge. A teacher cannot do it for you.

Khun Sujin is a good friend, not a teacher. She did not 'devise' any method, as you seem to think. She reads all the teachings and the commentaries, and suggests others to do the same and verify them for oneself. It is the Buddha who explained to be mindful of any reality which appears in daily life.

How then did I have the idea to listen to Khun Sujin? Because I found that she has practical advice which really works. I liked her insistence to verify everything myself. From time to time I pass Bangkok but most of the time I am on my own and I like it. I have the teachings, the scriptures, and my writing is a way to study and to be reminded to develop more understanding. If someone else has different accumulations and finds that he or she has to follow another way, I think that no arguments at all can stop

that person; accumulated inclinations are so deep, so strong. They drive someone into this or that direction.

I just received a letter from Sarah with interesting quotes of her discussions with Khun Sujin about daily life. The suggestions are again so practical, so full of 'common sense' as we would say in conventional terms.

But they are the fruit of right understanding in daily life.

First I will quote a remark of Sarah. She first thought that she had to be in a quiet place and she lived for some time in a temple. She said about her experience:

The more I understood that it is impossible to control life because it is conditioned from moment to moment, the less inclined I was to follow a particular practice in order to try to have quick results in a special quiet environment. There is no sudden enlightenment without the gradual development of understanding and awareness, however much our wishful thinking would like to think otherwise. I understood more clearly, from my reading and considering with friends, that Buddhism cannot be separated from our daily life. Some people may be naturally inclined to living in a temple, but not everybody has such inclinations.... No matter where we live, we need to be aware of the realities appearing through eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind at this moment. There is no other moment.... There is no moment when there is not a truth to be known. Greed, hatred, kindness, generosity, hearing and sound are not just words or labels, but they represent phenomena which can be understood with awareness when they occur.

As to Sarah's discussions with Khun Sujin, Sarah felt torn into many directions in her daily life in order to do her many different duties well.

.....Khun Sujin is emphasizing how it is not just understanding the problem, but understanding one's defilements which conditions that problem.... otherwise the understanding is very superficial; because the root is not the problem itself, but one's own lack of understanding and one's own defilements...

When we talked about the problem I found in certain social situations, when perhaps the conversation seemed uninteresting and I was wishing for another situation, Khun Sujin emphasized the importance of metta (loving kindness).

We have heard so much about metta and about its characteristic, namely, that it is the quality of loving kindness to all, to anyone we can help at the present moment. Yet we seem to forget and need to be reminded over and over again.

Khun Sujin kept asking, when I said I tended to think a lot about family and friends a long way off, 'What about the people around one now?'...

When there is a little metta to those around, one can see how much more happily or easily one's life begins to run and how we can see others as friends at such times (however unknown to us they may be), instead of looking critically towards them.

End quote. I would like to add something. One can understand more about metta if one sees that it all comes back to the citta now. Is it a citta with metta? Then there is friendship, no need to think of this person or that person. If one misses a particular person and likes his company when he is around it has nothing to do with metta, it is attachment. The difference should be known, only through mindfulness of the different characteristics.

When considering metta, metta is not to be limited to particular people or situations. I will continue quoting now:

One of the areas we discussed was the difficulty in frequent social contact, in situations involving many

people. Khun Sujin referred frequently to the

'guests through six doorways'. She reminded us that there are uninvited guests all the time, and that we should learn to be more accepting and tolerant of whatever 'guest' (in this absolute sense) there is, in whatever situation we find ourselves, and this with more understanding....

I would like to add: then one minds less whatever reality arises, it arises because of conditions. When there are conditions for akusala it will arise and all that can be done is knowing it with right understanding. When there is more 'tolerance' one will not try to force a change of situation.... I quote:

Understanding helps to have less attachment and aversion, instead of just wanting to be happy and have the situation at will.... Whatever appears as anatta (not self) can condition right understanding with awareness. Then one will enjoy everything in one's life. Instead of wishing to have steady pleasant feeling all the time, or all good things in life, there can be understanding of the realities of one's life, and such understanding conditions its very growing.

End quote. I add: If I am honest, I like steady pleasant feeling and all good things in life, but I also know that this is an illusion. With Susie I like the four pleasant worldly conditions and I need to be reminded that they lead to sorrow. When I was on my journey through Indonesia with the princess and prince of the Netherlands, I did not like being overlooked, being unimportant. Yet I took up a sutta and was reminded by words I had heard over and over again. I quote: from Kindred Saying IV, Part VIII,

Kindred Sayings about Headmen, par. 11. We read that the Buddha asked Bhadrakka:

'Now what think you, headman? Are there any people in Uruvelakappa owing to whose death or imprisonment or loss or blame there would come upon you sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair?'

'There are such people in Uruvelakappa, lord.'

'But, headman, are there any people in Uruvelakappa owing to whose death or imprisonment or loss or blame, no sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair would come upon you?'

'There are such people in Uruvelakappa, lord.'

'Now, headman, what is the reason, what is the cause why sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair would come upon you in respect of some, but not of others?'

'In the case of those, lord, owing to whose death or imprisonment or loss or blame there would come upon me sorrow.... I have desire and attachment. And as for the others, lord, I do not have such desire and attachment in their case.'

We read further on that the Buddha said that he would also know with regard to the past and future thus:

'...Whatever ill that has arisen in the past,--all that is rooted in desire, caused by desire. And whatsoever ill that will arise in the future,-- all that is rooted in desire, caused by desire. Desire, indeed, is the root of ill.'

I had to solve all my problems alone, Lodewijk was in Holland and I accompanied the princess and the prince on their journey for ten days. It helps to be reminded by words of the sutta and one can hear them over and over again. One is reminded of realities, it all depends on conditions what will happen next, gain or loss, praise or blame. But it is our own attachment, attachment to self one finds so important which makes us unhappy. The sutta reminded me to be aware of the present moment. When one sees that it is the only way to cope with life and when one sees how ignorant one is and how much one clings to the self, one is really motivated to go on developing right understanding. There are conditions for sati in daily life if one is really motivated.

Just now I had a conversation with my husband about the above subject. He heard of colleagues who had received honours which he had not received and he realized that he was jealous and that jealousy is so ugly; when it arises one may reason and reason but it will not go away by reasoning. I remarked that attachment to the self conditions very coarse akusala, such as jealousy. The sotapanna who has eradicated the clinging to the idea of self has also eradicated jealousy, through the development of the understanding of nama and rupa in daily life, and this is the only way. Then one can begin to understand one's life which is actually a moment of experiencing an object.

Sometimes the object is pleasant, sometimes unpleasant, it depends entirely on conditions. When one sees life as a series of conditioned phenomena, there will be less opportunity for jealousy. I remarked to Lodewijk that when one sees how one is overpowered by jealousy and other akusala dhammas one is really motivated to develop right understanding of nama and rupa and he agreed. I said that one can use such events as reminders to be aware now.

Thus, we have enough reminders in our daily life, if we only use them: our different defilements, the uncertainty in life as to the four pleasant and the four unpleasant 'worldly conditions', praise and blame, etc., the fleetiness of our own life and that of others, separation from what we like and the persons we like, so hard to bear.

I also discussed with Lodewijk his drive to work on and on. Is it all kusala, or is there also akusala? There is so much disappointment when the outcome of our work is not as we expected and then there is aversion. I quote a hearty remark from Sarah's discussions with Khun Sujin :

'...We forget that it is the thinking of ourselves, making ourselves important, conceit (mana) about the outcome of our work, instead of just doing what we can, that makes life difficult at these times.' ...Khun Sujin pointed out that one should consider why and for whom one is performing or doing one's job. Is it often our own ideals or ideas that we are more concerned to carry out?'

In other words, there is a lot of self in seemingly noble motives. Do we recognize that? It can be known through the development of right understanding. Panna can know everything, all the details of our life. Panna has to be keen, precise, exact. That is why phenomena such as seeing or hearing have to be known as well, they should not be overlooked. Does our life not consist of many moments of seeing or hearing? Is it not true that defilements often arise on account of what was seen and heard? Why then do we neglect seeing and hearing and why would one rather develop calm first?

Then one makes a long, complicated detour, one may be misled easily by clinging to calm. In the end one cannot get away not knowing seeing and hearing, why not begin right now?

Sarah discussed with Khun Sujin her clinging to concepts such as 'Adelaide', the place where she lives, and clinging to stories about people and situations she likes or dislikes. In reality they are only nama and rupa.

Khun Sujin often advises not to try to change one's life, it is conditioned already, but to 'follow' it with sati. I quote from Sarah's letter:

...Following life with sati. This is another way of describing how there should be more awareness and understanding of the 'uninvited guests' through the different doorways. Instead of comparing or thinking of another situation, one can learn to follow what is conditioned already, and develop sati. If one is in a hectic work situation or feels one is torn in too many directions, as I suggested I felt, what can one do? Panic and worry obviously do not help.... Of course it sounds very easy when Khun Sujin says 'just follow life with sati'. I started thinking or worrying about the same situations arising when I would return to Adelaide. She suggested

'cutting the story' with sati. A moment of awareness which is aware of thinking as thinking can help to make the story a little shorter each time.

If there is more consideration for others, what we are used to thinking of as the unpleasant situations can slowly become pleasant.

It is so obvious that real happiness in life is not a matter of following the objects of our attachment but helping to make others happy and fitting in with what they would like. Yet, even though we have heard this and it seems clear at a time, it is still such a change of direction that it is only gradually obvious on more than a theoretical level.

End quote. Cutting the story with sati. We live most of the time with our thoughts, our dreams, it is conditioned. But now and then there can be a moment of sati in between, and that is the moment there can be some understanding of what is real. Straight after this Khun Sujin speaks about consideration for others. Is there a connection of sati and consideration for others? Yes, very much so. When we begin to understand realities we find self less important. We accept situations as they are and this gives a sort of happiness which is not selfish, although there may be clinging again to this kind of happiness, but even that can be realized also. I found, during my journey with the princess and prince, that all this is true. It was my duty to consider their happiness in the first place, so I did not mind so much my own tiredness. I do not like hanging around souvenir shops, but this time I was pleased when the princess enjoyed it, even after a long day on the lake with boating and swimming. After that, she was shopping for more than two hours. During the long drives in the car I thought of our long trips in the bus together with Khun Sujin in India. I was reminded to be mindful of nama and rupa. I noticed how we are attached to every inch of our body and this reminded me not to neglect the hardness or softness which appeared, in order to know them as only rupas. I was also thinking of the happiness of the others which were in the company of the Princess and Prince, and those people did not always harmonize together, as may happen in a company where there are different people together on a journey. There were many opportunities to be a little more considerate for others. Sometimes I was very tired and not so happy, but then I remembered that it is not considerate to show an ugly face to others, and that helps. I sometimes have cocktail parties which are dull, but when there are a few moments of sati it is refreshing, unpleasant situations can become pleasant. Because then it does not matter so much any more where one is or with whom one is. Sati conditions patience with the different situations in daily life. This letter is becoming long, but I want to illustrate the benefit of sati for daily life; its aim is not quietness in a meditation room. How otherwise could we lead our daily life in a more wholesome way?

We should not underestimate a moment of right mindfulness of one nama or rupa at a time. We should not underestimate the process of accumulation of understanding. Khun Sujin spoke to Sarah about 'proximity condition', anantara paccaya. This is one of the types of condition among the 24 kinds.

Each citta which arises conditions the next one. For example, votthapana-citta, which determines in the sense-door process whether it will be followed by kusala citta or akusala citta is proximity condition for the succeeding citta. There are usually seven javana-cittas, in the case of non-arahats kusala citta or akusala citta. Each one of them conditions the succeeding one. I quote from Sarah's letter:

....She was discussing different conditions in order to help to see the nature of anatta of all phenomena. In particular, she was discussing anantara paccaya or proximity condition to point out how the moments of understanding

(of the namas and rupas) which succeed one another can lead to less clinging to 'Adelaide' as something or some situation. If there is more awareness that defilements also are not self, there will be less clinging to self. She pointed out that 'by not developing awareness whenever defilements arise, the defilements can rule over other dhammas'. It seems obvious, and we know so well in theory what reality is and what awareness is and yet so often seem to be 'back at square one' (It seems we have learnt nothing when it comes to the practice, N.)

Sarah's whole report about the different problems she experienced in the different situations of life seemed so familiar to me, they are the problems we all have, however much different our situations may seem to be. The situation is not important, we all have defilements and these cause us problems. With understanding of our daily life we can cope better with these problems and there are more conditions for

consideration of others and more conditions for all kinds of wholesomeness.

With metta,

Nina van Gorkom

Letters from Nina

Seventh Letter

28 July '82.

Jakarta.

Dear Susie,

You just handed me some helpful points in your letter which I want to quote.

You point out that we forget that it is kilesa, defilements, which drive us on in daily life. When we like akusala we do not seem to see it:

...I don't think that we just have to talk about the problems of the day or the situation, but what about all those times when life is running so smoothly. That is when it is harder for Blanche and for me (and for me,

Nina!!) to see that even when life is comfortable (probably just more lobha) that is the moment when understanding is needed also. Tomorrow may fall apart, but today has been full of pleasantries, good laughs and good food, but I did not see any need to be aware during any of it....

Susie then proceeds saying that someone who sits in a quiet place can be just as infatuated by his thoughts as someone who is joining with his friends. In other words it is essential to know citta now, whatever one feels like doing, otherwise one takes for noble calm what is just selfishness, 'my calm'; attachment to an idea one takes for calm. A good point to remember is that also when life is smooth we need to develop understanding. When I am in a difficult situation, on the verge of tears, I may grab the teachings in order to find a consoling word to help me keep going. One ponders about it, it is helpful, but also when there is no trouble the Buddha liked to remind us: life is short, even now we are in trouble, going towards death without fail, there is decay in our body right now, our head is on fire and in such situation we do not delay to find a remedy. The remedy is knowing the truth of something which is right at hand: six doors. Thus, we really need the teachings, just as we need food every day. It should become a habit to take this food, a habit one should really cultivate. My food at lunch was so good (tempe with vegetables), while I was reading your letter and laughing at your touches of humor (you are always to me a person full of fun), and how easily we forget to know such moments for what they are: conditioned and passing, not self. You then quote Khun Sujin who says that, when we have a problem, it is important to understand, not so much the story of the problem, the details, the situation, the people involved, but really the defilements which are the real cause of problems. You stress how we also cling to 'my dosa':

...life is basically running well for Tadao and I, until the next difficulty arises. And then I may once again be as swept away by 'my problem'...And somehow we even cling to the story of my problems and the negative aspects of life. I think we like to elaborate on the dosa side of life. I think we are very attached at times to our difficult or sad story and like to draw people's concern to us by elaborating only on these aspects of our day. I lived in the 'oh poor me' world for a long time and it is a difficult habit to break. We fail to see that the whole point of Dhamma is absolutely positive.

End quote. You then ask me about my remark, that one can understand more about metta if one sees that it all comes back to the citta now. Well, if we have no understanding of citta now, whether it is kusala or akusala, don't we misled ourselves most of the time, taking for metta what is in fact attachment? Like you

just wrote, you prepare a meal for the one you love, mostly with attachment. We may think and write about metta, but what about it now? We usually forget about the present moment, but if there is less forgetfulness and thus also less absorption in all the objects which seem to assail us, there is more opportunity for metta. You remark about something you heard: how can we ever give up the idea of self if we can't give away things, and you ask whether this can be applied to metta. Yes, because metta is unselfishness; when there is metta, you actually give something to someone else: kindness, kind thoughts, kind words, or kind acts. Metta is one of the perfections the Bhodhisatta had to develop together with satipatthana in order to attain Buddhahood. Metta can soak loose selfishness. The development of right understanding of nama and rupa conditions more metta in life.

Metta goes out to all beings, it does not choose: this person, but not that person. You ask whether there are moments of thinking with metta. There are all the time moments of thinking about situations, persons, thus the thinking can also be done with metta instead of with akusala. Now you give another good reminder:

...I have some desire to be selective with whom there should be more metta.

Yes, I know, just be aware of whatever appears. Tricky, because we are so caught up in desire and only looking for future moments; future understanding and future awareness...Really, the learning can only be done from one point in place and time, here and now. I find that, once again, I am truly at the beginning....

Khun Sujin would say, so, begin again and again. Our life consists of beginning. You then write about the 'humbling effect of understanding':

Yes, the Dhamma is so practical and full of common sense. It can be seen everywhere in the teachings. Possibly we are not as concerned with the practical as we may wish to think and may look for something of the fantastic, something a little out of the ordinary, rather than this very ordinary moment of unawareness...

You then continue, saying that there can be wrong practice in a residual form, when we want to be successful, as I mentioned in reference to calm. Is there, not only as regards calm, but also in the development of understanding of nama and rupa, an idea of wanting to have success for ourselves? Alan Driver, when still a monk, used to say: 'what do you want awareness for, to show it to others?' This clinging to success makes us impatient. When there is impatience we can check: this comes from clinging, clinging to success. That is why we find ourselves too good to begin and begin again. You continue:

...This is where I think understanding has a truly humbling effect, because with the growth of understanding, and, can it be said, the 'lessening' of the self, one would become less concerned with the success of self.

I think if one is busy time and again to know the present, there will be less and less thinking anyway, and less thinking about success in the future. Understanding has a humbling effect, because one really gets to know better the moments of defilements. At first one may think: O, I do not really cling to a self, I understand all the Buddha taught. And then one may find out that there is such an amount of clinging one did not realize before one had. If one thinks that one has not much to learn the situation gets really dangerous.

I was quoting to Blanche the practical advice Khun Sujin gave us, and she replied that she finds it just common sense anybody could think of, and she asks: where is the Buddhist flavour? In other words, she misses the typical

Buddhist approach in such advice about the situations of daily life. This is an interesting point, and I try to go into it a little more. It is actually again: understanding of citta now, what I just wrote. Is that not the Buddha's teaching? To be more precise: understanding citta as only a conditioned reality, not self. This is the essence of the teachings. This understanding can eventually eradicate defilements. But this

understanding can only begin at the present moment. Whether one likes to hear it or not.

Perhaps too ordinary? Not fantastic, something out of the ordinary, as you just said? If there is no understanding that each moment is conditioned, that is has arisen already, that all that can be done is trying to understand it, to understand nama as nama and rupa as rupa, we may be choosy about what should be the object of awareness: this reality, not that one, not akusala, that is not a good object of awareness. So one chooses only calm, one does not want to know one's akusala, one misleads oneself, one lives in an artificial world one creates oneself. While on the other hand, it is so helpful for one's daily life, one's dealing with others included, to just begin to know the seeing as only a nama which sees, visible object as only a rupa, a reality which does not know anything, no person. To know that whatever is experienced is conditioned, whether we like it or not. It helps us to accept suffering, old age, troubles. All that matters is the development of understanding which can lead us on in the right way, to walk the right way in life. In this way one makes the best of one's life. One may see two people helping someone else, but the cittas are so different. One may expect something in return, or have selfish motives, be full of the idea of self. Another person may outwardly do the same good deeds, but his citta is different: he is mindful and realizes that that moment of helping is conditioned, only a nama, not self. Thus, his whole attitude is different, but someone else may not see any difference. The life of someone who develops satipatthana is very ordinary, just daily life, but, and this is the difference, there is right understanding, or rather a developing understanding. In this way one applies the teachings. This is very ordinary, common sense advice, it may seem. But if one knows the purpose of the teachings, such advice is really different. The development of right understanding of the present reality is not always mentioned, but it is implied. We should remember this when we read the Buddha's advice to laypeople; it seems almost too ordinary, but we should understand the goal of his teachings: purification through the development of right understanding now, always now, whether one likes to hear it or not.

One will be really urged to develop right understanding if one realizes that one is full of self, but if one does not know this, there will not be any urge. To be full of self: this does not even mean that one thinks of a self, it is the deep-rooted clinging to self which is latent and motivates many other kinds of defilements. Even if one does not think 'It is me, it is self' one can still be full of self. Don't we take the body as a whole, a body, instead of different ever changing phenomena? Don't we take the mind as a mind, a mind which sees and also understands the meaning of the concepts of trees and people after the seeing, instead of realizing the mind as ever changing phenomena, then seeing, then thinking, and they are all totally different. Seeing has nothing to do with thinking, although they may arise closely one after the other. I do not say that there is wrong view arising all the time, but is there not a deep-rooted wrong interpretation of reality? We cannot claim that we see realities as they are, that we know the difference between seeing and visible object, seeing and thinking of concepts. There is still such a lot to learn, and thus, why put it off? One loses precious time if one thinks one has to be calm first. One can wait for ever.

This letter is at the same time my answer to Blanche's last letter. Since I am almost going on leave I sent the letter to Sarah. I do not understand anything about the quotations from the meditation teachers, and thus I cannot discuss it. To me it is such a tangle: the citta which does not quiver, what is the meaning? Naturally everyone has to decide for himself what way he wants to go in life. But before one does that it is useful to have a foundation knowledge of all the realities, including calm, so that one knows exactly with what types of cittas calm arises. One has to know about the different processes of cittas, about the different cetasikas accompanying cittas. So hopefully the reprint of the Abhidhamma book will be sent soon from

Sri Lanka to Blanche. At the end of her letter I see some real concern to know the truth. Blanche felt that not too much time is left. It makes me think of the 'Sister' (in the Therigatha 57, Vijaya), who had been going around in circles, never finding what she needed. And then she heard about the elements, the namas and rupas and found that the clear, exact foundation knowledge is needed first. In the meantime it makes no sense to have discussions about calm.

We read in the Therigatha, that Vijaya, after she had attained arahatship, said:

Four times, nay five, I sallied from my cell,

And roamed afield to find the peace of mind
I lacked, and governance of thoughts
I could not bring into captivity.
Then to a bhikkhuni (nun) I came and asked
Full many a question of my doubts.
To me she taught Dhamma: the elements,
Organ and object in the life of sense,
And then the factors of the Nobler life:
The ariyan Truths, the Faculties, the Powers,
The Seven Factors of Enlightenment,
The Eightfold Way, leading to utmost good.
I heard her words, her bidding I obeyed.
While passed the first watch of the night there rose
Long memories of the bygone line of lives.
While passed the second watch, the Heavenly Eye,
Purview celestial, I clarified.
While passed the last watch of the night, I burst
And rent aside the gloom of ignorance.
Then, letting joy and blissful ease of mind,
Suffuse my body, seven days I sat,
Ere stretching out cramped limbs I rose again.
Was it not rent indeed, that muffling mist?
With metta,

Nina van Gorkom

Part 111

Letters from Nina

Eighth Letter

March 2nd, '83.

Jakarta.

Dear Susie,

In your last letter you asked a question about the difference between thinking of a reality such as hardness and direct awareness of it. Of course, there are questions which often preoccupy us. I will first quote from your letter:

I instantly want to locate hardness as arising in a particular spot. Just thinking, not direct awareness, but does thinking help us to understand more about hardness? Or can we only understand hardness at a moment of direct awareness, no locating or selecting? It seems that when we talk or think about hardness (or any nama or rupa) we immediately try to locate it. Maybe this is just the natural inclination; we think that we already know realities as they are. It seems that we have to refine our theoretical understanding of hardness... and then some moment of awareness, wherever and whenever it may be... just go on creating the conditions now.

There is thinking of realities and then another step has to be taken to immediate, direct, clear knowledge of them. We keep on wondering when this may happen and long so much for clear knowledge; we like to create the conditions for it.

First of all, before going more deeply into the steps which have to be taken, it may be useful to consider what our purpose is. Is there something wrong with our attitude? When we read the scriptures we notice that the Buddha reminded both monks and laypeople time and again of dana

(generosity), of sila (morality), of samatha and of the development of right understanding of realities. People knew already that dana, sila and samatha were ways of kusala, but when they had not heard the Buddha's teaching they did not know that through the development of the eightfold Path the wrong view of self and all other defilements can be eradicated.

We have heard the Buddha's teaching and thus we may understand, at least in theory, that there are only nama and rupa, no self, and then, when we see that it is wrong to cling to a self, our purpose will be the eradication of clinging to self. We may realize that we often think of 'self' and that we will continue to be dissatisfied in life because of our clinging to 'self'.

Then we shall be more urged to grasp every opportunity to think less of 'I,

I, I', and thus we shall, more than we used to, also see dana, sila and samatha as means to be less selfish. When we give something away with generosity, we do not, at such a moment, cling to our possessions. If we hold on to what is 'ours' how can we become detached from the idea of

'self'? We may consider sila as a way of being more thoughtful to others, not wanting to hurt them. Sila comprises also helping others and paying respect to those who deserve respect. As to samatha, this is a means to cultivate wholesome thoughts and at such moments there are no selfish thoughts. When we are with other people we may remember to cultivate loving kindness and compassion. Or there may be opportunities to cultivate sympathetic joy when we rejoice in their good fortune. We cling to our body, but when we see a corpse we may realize that there are only rupas, empty phenomena, which do not know anything and do not belong to a self. We can then be reminded that also the living body consists of rupas which are impermanent and not self.

Studying the teachings and considering them is a necessary foundation for the development of vipassana. In studying the teachings we will understand more about the reality of sati (mindfulness) which is not self, and the reality of panna (wisdom) which is not self. Then we will be less inclined to just sit and wait for the arising of sati we are longing for. It is important to consider more our basic attitude, to get to know ourselves. Are we seeking ourselves, our awareness, our knowledge? We may think that we go the right

way while we in fact keep on 'creating' conditions with an idea of self. The goal of the development of right understanding should be, from the beginning, to have less clinging to 'self'.

Sati and panna arise because of different conditioning factors. One condition is having listened to the right teachings, and this may have been also in former lives, although we do not remember that now. Moreover, accumulated dana, sila and samatha are conditioning factors. They are beneficial, since they can help us to become less selfish. We have to consider the teachings and practise them in daily life. We cannot fathom the many kinds of conditions which have to work together so that panna can be developed.

We were discussing about the step from theoretical knowledge to direct understanding which has to be taken. There is not just one step. It is a whole process of 'studying' characteristics of realities which appear now.

We may still try to 'select' the object of awareness, we may select hardness or visible object. We may keep on thinking about realities, and then the reality arising at that moment is thinking. When there is, for example, thinking about hardness, thinking experiences a concept. The reality of hardness is not directly known at that moment.

Do we know the reality of thinking? Is there thinking with lobha

(attachment) or dosa (aversion)? We know so little about thinking, we do not even know whether there is thinking which is wholesome or thinking which is unwholesome. How much selfishness is there with our thinking?

We already discussed many times what should be known by panna: any reality which appears through one of the six doors. But it may still be difficult to realize this in the practice. When, for example, hardness appears, what should panna know and how do we know that there is panna? When hardness presents itself, it is experienced by body-consciousness and then most likely by lobha-mula-citta, but we do not even notice this. When we realize,

'There is hardness', there may be subtle clinging. It should be stressed that panna should know hardness as only a kind of rupa; it should know this with a degree of detachment. When panna grows there will be more detachment. In order to know the falling away of what is only a nama or a rupa a higher degree of detachment is needed. It cannot be known in the beginning.

'Without studying realities which appear panna cannot grow', Khun Sujin so often repeated. It is not one step from theoretical understanding to clear understanding, it is a long process of stumbling and falling, then realizing that you are wrong and beginning again. It is important not to forget that sati is not self and that panna is not self. That means, when it is the right time for sati it arises already, it is aware already of hardness, visible object or whatever other object it may be. These moments are again conditions for the growing of panna which is not self, which arises when there are the right conditions for it. We may be able to admit the truth of:

"it sees, it hears, it thinks". But can we also realize: "it is aware"? This may be hard, if we are honest, we like to do many things to arouse sati, to create conditions, and we cling to an idea of 'my sati'.

Should we then be passive, just lazy, since it is no use to try? This is a question which is often asked. Can there be study with awareness of the present moment also while we ask such a question? Then we would know more about our different cittas. This is the meaning of 'study': making an effort to understand what appears now, but at the same time realizing that there is no self who can make an effort. When we see the urgency of eradicating clinging to the self, it is a condition not to waste our life away with akusala. There will be many opportunities for different kinds of kusala. When there is an opportunity for reading the teachings we will use it, tomorrow there may not be time, better do it today. Or, if there is no opportunity for reading, there are so many living reminders around us of the truth of Dhamma. Our own defilements, decay, sickness and death. The world of the six doorways. We may have discussed many times about visible object, which is not a person or thing. We may be surrounded by what we believe are people, but

sometimes there may be a short moment of realizing that what appears through the eyes is not a person, just colour or visible object.

In this context I like to quote from your letter:

'Dhamma is completely about life. It is so simple that we all miss it all the time. Seeing now. Too easy. And because there is no great verbalisation it doesn't fit into our definition of something to be understood. I was drawn to the Dhamma because it was so straight forward, no nonsense. It really makes sense.'

Yes, the Buddha spoke about the six doors and the objects to be experienced through the six doors. No long theoretical treatises, because he taught about realities which can be directly experienced. How do you like the following quotation about feeling: 'Feeling is that which feels'¹. It feels. That is all. The

'it' is very important though. Hard to detach from it, it is so much 'my feeling'.

We read in the 'Middle Length Sayings' I (no. 43, Mahavedallasutta) that

Kotthita asked Sariputta:

'But what is intuitive wisdom for, your reverence?'

'Your reverence, intuitive wisdom is for super-knowledge, for apprehending, for getting rid of.'

'But how many conditions are there, your reverence, for bringing right understanding into existence?'

'There are two conditions, your reverence, for bringing right understanding into existence: the utterance of another (person) and wise attention. Your reverence, there are the two conditions for bringing wise attention into existence.'

Listening to the right Dhamma and wise attention, that is, wisely considering the Dhamma we have heard. Realities have to be 'studied' so that panna can grow. Panna is for 'getting rid of', getting rid of wrong view and the other defilements.

The other day the Burmese Ambassador said to me, while we were standing at a cocktail party: 'If you don't try, you will not reach nibbana.' Now, such an advice one may take in the wrong way or in the right way. There may be clinging to an idea of: 'I shall reach nibbana', and an idea of self who tries. No matter how hard one tries, there may not be conditions for attaining nibbana. It is not very fruitful to think too much of nibbana, also the Bodhisatta had to develop wisdom for innumerable lives before he became the Buddha. However, we can take such an advice also in the right way. Nibbana is the reality which extinguishes defilements and we should not forget that it is urgent to develop the way which eventually leads to it. If we do not begin to develop panna now, panna will never grow. (This is also the meaning of the following sutta in Kindred Sayings (II, Ch XVI, Kindred Sayings on

Kassapa, par. 2, Careless), where Sariputta asks Maha-Kassapa in how far it is true that nibbana cannot be attained 'without ardour and without care'.

With Ardour is in Pali atapi, which word is also used time and again in the

'Satipatthana sutta', in connection with 'sampajano satima', which means: with understanding and mindfulness. As to 'with care', this is in Pali 'ottappa', fear of blame. We read:

When, friend, a monk thinks thus: Bad and evil states that have not arisen, were they to arise, would conduce to my hurt-- and no ardour is aroused, this is to be without ardour. So also when he thinks: Bad and evil states that have arisen if they are not eliminated, would conduce to my hurt,- or: -

Good states that have arisen, were they not to arise,- or: - Good states that have arisen, were they to cease,

these things would conduce to my hurt- and no ardour is aroused, this is to be without ardour.

And how, friends, is a man without care? When, in these four cases, he uses no care.

Thus it is, friend, that a man who is without ardour, without care, is incapable of enlightenment, incapable of Nibbana, incapable of the uttermost security.

And how, friend, is he ardent and careful? Even in each of these four considerations. Thus it is, friend, that a man who is ardent and careful is capable of enlightenment, of Nibbana, of the uttermost safety.

If we understand that 'evil states' are bound to arise when there is no

'right effort' with ardour and care, there will be a sense of urgency to apply oneself to kusala and above all to be aware of realities which appear.

There may be awareness of visible object, but we may not be sure about the reality which experiences visible object. When visible object appears there sure must also be a reality which sees. We may remind ourselves of this and then there is thinking, but thinking is also a reality which can be known.

If we do not select objects of awareness and just continue being aware of whatever reality appears there will also be conditions for being aware of seeing as a reality which experiences visible object.

A question which is often asked is how one can be mindful in daily life, when one is busy with one's work and quite involved in it.

One may cling to long moments of sati, but it is right understanding which has to be developed, with the aim to detach from the self and later on from all realities. It would be better not to think so much of having awareness or having long moments of it, it is bound to be thinking with clinging. Khun

Sujin often said, 'the test of the development of panna is in daily life.'

We have understood in theory about the development of understanding and now it has to be developed in daily life. If there is tiredness or boredom, we should know that these also are realities. We can never escape from nama and rupa in our life, they arise all the time.

You asked me whether there is a particular usefulness in my trips to

Thailand and my visits to Khun Sujin. These are opportunities to meet friends and discuss Dhamma, and I find a good example of someone who practices Dhamma particularly inspiring and helpful. What I just said about not losing opportunities for the development of understanding and for other kinds of kusala, this is practised all the time by Khun Sujin. We can learn from her not to despise any kind of kusala and to use it as a means to decrease clinging to the self, because this is the goal. The events of Khun

Sujin's daily life are so ordinary: shopping, playing scrabble with her sisters, taking her father out to luncheon and looking after him, watching the news on T.V. in the evening. This is daily life of a great number of laypeople, and right understanding can be developed no matter what one is doing. It can be practised, and this is proved. When someone needs a little encouragement or has a problem, even a problem in worldly matters, Khun

Sujin is always ready to help and speaks the right words at the right time.

Long discussions about Dhamma may often be too theoretical. Khun Sujin's own example and just a few words about Dhamma are more helpful. But in between her duties, Khun Sujin has time for reading the scriptures and commentaries, and Sunday morning she spends preparing her radio talks. We can learn from her not to put off things if there is an opportunity to do them now, such as for example studying the teachings and being mindful of realities. 'We never know what will happen tomorrow, or even the next

moment', she said. If we realize that each moment arises because of different conditions, and is completely different from preceding moments, and following moments, it will help us to have a greater sense of urgency to study the reality appearing at the present moment.

I listened to an old tape made in Sri Lanka and heard Khun Sujin say:

'Even one moment of awareness is very precious, like a penny. When pennies are saved, they can become a capital. People are always very impatient, they just want to attain now in this life. But what about the reality now? One may sit without any understanding.'

It is true that right understanding begins at this moment, how otherwise could it develop? When we watch T.V. , it is daily life, it is the same as meeting people in daily life. We may think 'This is Susie, this is Tadao', and then we should realize that such a moment is not seeing. One can prove this for oneself, consider such a moment and come to know the different characteristics of realities. If different characteristics are not clear yet, they can become clearer. All this is 'study', study of realities, different from the study of books.

Another example: one cannot hear words. The moment of 'hearing' words, understanding their meaning, is different from the experience of just sound.

Also this can be 'studied', again and again. Khun Sujin often said: 'Begin again, begin again, until it is clear, just develop it.' How many opportunities of study do we let go by? Reading is different from merely experiencing visible object. When we read we are quite absorbed in the story, there is a great deal of thinking. But there must also be moments of seeing, experiencing visible object. This is daily life. So you see that we have a long way to go in order to have clear knowledge of realities.

With metta,

Nina van Gorkom

Letters from Nina

Ninth Letter

Jakarta.

July 15, '83.

Dear Khun Charupan,

When I was in Bangkok recently I was glad to meet you and my other friends again in Khun Sujin's house and also in the temple. I appreciate it that all of you help Khun Sujin to explain the Dhamma to others, be it in the way of printing books, transcribing Khun Sujin's radio talks or translating. The copies of the tapes made by Khun Sukol Kalyanamit when your group had Dhamma discussions in India are of great benefit to many people. I listen to them often. Khun Sujin told me that Khun Sukol sent one set of these tapes to a blind monk in Bangkok, but that the monk did not receive them. Instead of having aversion Khun Sukol rejoiced since he thought of the benefit which someone else who received these tapes would have. He then sent another set to the blind monk. The monk wanted to show his appreciation by arranging to send fresh milk to all those who would be present on Sunday in the temple

(Wat Bovornives) listening to Khun Sujin's lecture. I happened to be present when the milk was given and thus I could also rejoice in the monk's kind and thoughtful gesture. My husband commented that this sounds like a story from the suttas in the Buddha's time. He appreciated it that Khun Sukol, instead of being annoyed about the loss of tapes, thought of someone else's benefit. When there is wise attention to the object which is experienced at that moment, there can be kusala citta instead of akusala citta.

You asked my comment on a few Dhamma questions. These are questions we all have and I find it helpful to think about the answers since this gives me an opportunity to consider Dhamma. I shall repeat your questions and comment on them.

Question : What is the characteristic of fear and how can it be overcome? I have fear of old age, sickness and death. I fear sickness and death of those who are dear to me. I have many kinds of fears. I also fear an unhappy rebirth. So long as one is not a sotapanna (streamwinner, the person who has attained the first stage of enlightenment), one may be reborn in an unhappy plane where there is no opportunity to develop satipatthana. The good deeds one performs in this life are no guarantee for a happy rebirth. A bad deed performed even in a past life may condition an unhappy rebirth.

Answer : Unwholesome fear is a form of dosa, aversion. When dosa arises we do not like the object which is experienced at that moment. There are many forms of dosa. It may be a slight aversion or it may be hate, or it may take the form of fear or dread. When there is fear we shrink back from the object and would like to flee from it, or we may think with worry and dread about an unpleasant event which may happen in the future, such as old age, sickness and death, or an unhappy rebirth.

Fear arises so long as there are still conditions for its arising. It cannot be eradicated at once, only the anagami (non-returner, the person who has attained the third stage of enlightenment) has eradicated it completely. The development of right understanding is the only way leading to the eradication of fear. When fear arises it should be seen as it is: only a conditioned reality, not self. Fear is conditioned by ignorance and by clinging. We cling to all the pleasant objects and we have fear to lose them. We read in the 'Gradual Saying' (Book of the Sixes, Ch III, par.3,

Fear) about different names given to sense-desires, in order to show their dangers. One of these names is fear. We read:

...And wherefore, monks, is fear a name for sense-desires? Monks, impassioned by sensuous passions, bound by passionate desire, neither in this world is one free from fear, not in the next world is one free from fear.

Therefore 'fear' is a name for sense-desires....

In order to develop right understanding there should be awareness of any reality which appears and we should not reject anything as object of awareness. When fear appears it can be object of awareness.

We may have theoretical understanding of the fact that we cannot control any reality which arises and that we thus cannot control the rebirth-consciousness of the next life. However, we still may be troubled by fear of rebirth. It is love of 'self' which conditions this fear. We are worried about what will happen to the 'self' after we die and we are afraid that this 'self' will not be successful in the development of insight in the next life. The sotapanna does not worry about what would happen to a self, because he has eradicated belief in a self. Moreover, he has no more conditions for an unhappy rebirth. So long as one is not a sotapanna one clings to a self and there are conditions for an unhappy rebirth.

It is understandable that we worry about the possibility of developing right understanding in a next life. However, we should remember that a moment of awareness of a reality is never lost, it conditions the arising of awareness again, later on. Also awareness which arises now is conditioned, it is conditioned by moments of listening to the Dhamma and considering it in the past, even in past lives. Even so awareness which arises now, although it falls away, conditions awareness in the future since it is accumulated. Even if the next birth would be in an unhappy plane, where there is no opportunity to develop insight, there will be following lives again in other planes where the development of insight can continue. Even the Bodhisatta was once reborn in a hell plane, but after that life he was reborn in the human plane where he continued to develop satipatthana.

Unwholesome fear, which is a form of dosa, is harmful for mind and body.

However, there is also wholesome fear, which is fear of akusala and its consequences. This fear is different from dosa. Each kusala citta is accompanied by the sobhana cetasikas which are hiri, shame of akusala, and ottappa, fear of blame, fear of the consequences of akusala. When these two cetasikas perform their functions, there cannot be akusala citta at that moment. Wholesome fear of the danger of being in the cycle of birth and death can urge us to persevere with the development of insight until all defilements are eradicated. Then there will be no more rebirth.

When the Buddha was still a Bodhisatta he developed satipatthana with patience and perseverance in order to attain Buddhahood and thus to be able to teach other beings as well the way leading to the end of birth. The

'Mugapakkha Jataka' (VI, no. 538) gives an impressive account of the

Bodhisatta's heroism. He never was neglectful of his task of developing wisdom, since he had a wholesome fear of rebirth in Hell. He had to suffer severe tribulations, but he was always perfectly composed and never showed any weak point. When we are in difficult situations do we have perseverance to develop insight? Can there be awareness of any reality which appears through one of the six doors? We may find it difficult to develop right understanding when we are very busy or when we are with other people. We could consider such circumstances as a test or an examination we have to pass. If we fail we have to begin again and again. When we read the

'Mugapakkha Jataka' we can be reminded not to be neglectful in the development of insight. If we realize that it is dangerous to be in the cycle of birth and death there can be a wholesome fear which urges us to be mindful now.

We read in the 'Mugapakkha Jataka' that the Bodhisatta was born as the son of the King of Kasi and received the name 'Temiya'. He remembered that in a former life when he was a King he condemned people to death. As a result of akusala kamma he was reborn in hell. After that he was reborn as Prince

Temiya. When he remembered these former lives he decided that he did not want to succeed his father as King and therefore he pretended to be cripple, deaf and dumb. Five hundred infants born to the concubines of the King were his companions. When they cried for milk he did not cry, reflecting that to die of thirst would be better than to reign as king and risk rebirth in hell. In order to test him he was given milk after the proper time or not at all, but he did not cry. The nurses spent one year in trying him but did not discover any weak point. In order to test him the other children were given cakes and dainties and they quarreled and struck one another. The Bodhisatta would not look at the cakes and dainties. He said : 'O Temiya, eat the cakes and dainties if you wish for hell'. People kept on trying him in many ways but he was always patient and composed, realizing the danger of an unhappy rebirth. People tried to frighten him with a wild elephant and with serpents but they did not succeed. They tempted him with pleasant objects.

Performances of mimes were given and the other children shouted 'bravo' and laughed, but Temiya did not want to look and remained motionless, reflecting that in hell there never would be a moment of laughter and joy. In order to find out whether he was really deaf they let conch blowers make a burst of sound , but they could not through a whole day detect in him any confusion of thought or any disturbance of hand or foot, or even a single start. They smeared his body with molasses and put him in a place infested with flies which bit him, but he remained motionless and perfectly apathetic. When he was sixteen years old they tried to tempt him with beautiful women who were dancing and singing. We read: '...but he looked at them in his perfect wisdom and stopped his inhalations and exhalations in fear lest they should touch his body, so that his body became quite rigid.'

The Bodhisatta looked with perfect composure and with wisdom at the beautiful women. While he was motionless during his trials and tests he was not idle, he was mindful. In order to attain Buddhahood he had to develop satipatthana with perseverance. He was mindful of realities, no matter in what situation. Although this is not mentioned in the Jatakas all the time, it is implied.

Finally the King was advised to bury him alive. When the charioteer was digging the hole for his grave,

Temiya was adorned by Sakka with heavenly ornaments. He then told the charioteer that he was not cripple, deaf and dumb. He became an ascetic and preached to his parents about impermanence:

'It is death who smites this world, old age who watches at our gate,

And it is the nights which pass and win their purpose soon or late.

As when the lady at her loom sits weaving all the day,

Her task grows ever less and less- so waste our lives away.

As speeds the hurrying river's course on, with no backward flow,

So in its course the life of men does ever forward go;

And as the river sweeps away trees from its banks upturn,

So are we men carried along by age and death in headlong ruin.'

He explained to his father that he did not want the kingdom, stating that wealth, youth, wife and children and all other joys do not last. He said:

'Do what you have to do today,

Who can ensure the morrow's sun?

Death is the Master-general

Who gives his guarantee to none.'

These words can remind us not to put off our task of developing right understanding of any reality which appears. The Bodhisatta was unshakable in his resolution to develop right understanding. Also when he was put to severe tests, he did not prefer anything else to the development of wisdom.

Are we resolute as well? Or are we forgetful of what is really worthwhile in our life? Wisdom is more precious than any kind of possession, honour or praise.

After I had written about the Bodhisatta Temiya, I had an opportunity to practice patience and perseverance in mindfulness. That same evening my husband and I had to attend an official Rotary dinner. My husband was placed at the head table, but I was separated from him and placed somewhere else, at a side-table in the midst of people I did not know very well. There were moments of aversion but I also remembered Khun Sujin's remarks that it is so good to be 'nobody', not 'somebody'. We like to be 'somebody' but in reality there are no people, only conditioned *namas* and *rupas*. In order to become really convinced of the truth it is urgent to develop understanding of colour, sound, or any other reality which appears now. We had to wait for our food for a long time since there were many speeches. I remembered

Bodhisatta Temiya who was patient and composed in all circumstances. Since he saw the danger of rebirth in hell he never was neglectful as to the development of wisdom. He said to himself time and again when he was tortured: 'Worse than these tortures are the tortures in hell.' I had moments of *dosa* but I also remembered the conversation you had with Khun

Sujin in India about aversion and which I heard on the tape. You spoke about having aversion because you had awareness only of hardness and softness and not of colour or seeing. Khun Sujin said that thinking with aversion is also a reality, it is conditioned and beyond control, not self. Also aversion can be object of awareness so that it can be realized as not self. We should continue to develop understanding of each reality which appears and not leave out unpleasant realities. When the food was finally served that

evening I had attachment to flavour, but also that reality can be an object of awareness. Although there cannot be clear understanding yet after only a few moments of awareness we can begin again and again in order to develop it.

Although the evening was not pleasant or interesting, when there is mindfulness time is not wasted. There were ceremonies such as the installment of the new board and the exchange of banners with visitors from other Rotary Clubs. I noticed that people attached great importance to such ceremonies, but then, don't we all attach importance to the events of our life: to what people say or do to us, to our likes or dislikes? So long as we do not see realities as they are, as only nama and rupa, we find ourselves very important and we are anxious about what will happen to the 'self'. The 'Mughapakkha Jataka' can remind us to prefer nothing else to the development of right understanding. When we consider the danger of being in the cycle of birth and death there can be, instead of unwholesome fear, wholesome fear so that we are urged to be aware now.

Next time I shall comment on your other questions .

With Metta,

Nina van Gorkom

Letters from Nina

Tenth Letter

Jakarta.

19 July, '83.

Dear Khun Charupan,

Now I will proceed with your other questions.

Question: I have awareness only of hardness or softness, but not of visible object or seeing. I think mindfulness of seeing is most difficult because there arises such a lot of clinging on account of what is experienced through the eye-door. Visible object seems to stay, it does not seem to fall away. Whereas sound seems to stop again after it has arisen. Is that the falling away of it? Awareness of sound seems to be less difficult.

Answer: It depends on the sati of which reality there is mindfulness. Sati is anatta, we cannot control it. Do we know what sati is? Or do we confuse it with thinking about a reality? Even when we believe that there is mindfulness of hardness there may only be thinking about it, about the place where it impinges, instead of mindfulness of only the characteristic of hardness. Are we sure when the nama which experiences hardness appears and when the rupa which is hardness? If we are not sure we still confuse nama and rupa. When hardness appears there must also be the reality which experiences hardness, but sati can only be mindful of one reality at a time. We would like to know clearly which reality appears at the present moment, nama or rupa, but this is not possible in the beginning. We may wonder how it is possible to be mindful of that which we do not know clearly. When we take sati for self it seems an impossible task to be mindful of different kinds of realities. However, sati, not self, is aware and sati is conditioned by many moments in the past of listening to the Dhamma and considering it . When there are the right conditions for sati it arises and it is aware of one object at a time, either of nama or of rupa.

We cannot select the object of sati. It seems difficult to be aware of visible object. We may regret this, but when there is regret we should remember that even at such a moment there are realities and these can be object of awareness. If we do not reject any object of awareness there will be conditions for sati to be aware of different kinds of objects. Thus it will gradually develop.

You said that awareness of sound seems to be easier than awareness of visible object and that sound seems to stop after it has appeared. Can we be sure what stops, sound or hearing? Do we clearly distinguish sound from hearing, or do they seem to appear together? Then there is no right awareness yet of these realities.

When sound seems to stop, is there not thinking of sound which stops, instead of awareness of the characteristic of sound? Sound is a reality which can be experienced through the earsense. We do not have to think of it or name it 'sound' in order to be mindful of its characteristic. Sound is rupa, it does not know anything. It is quite different from hearing, the nama which experiences sound.

Nama and rupa arise and fall away, but how could their arising and falling away be realized when there is not yet clear knowledge of their different characteristics. Panna should be developed so that first nama can be clearly distinguished from rupa, and later on, when panna reaches a higher stage, the arising and falling away of nama and rupa can be realized.

We may believe that one reality is easier to understand than another, but in the beginning no reality can be clearly understood. Instead of deluding ourselves we should realize what we do not know yet. Then we will be urged to be aware of any reality which appears, without trying to control sati.

I would like to include in this letter also Dhamma questions I received from others.

Question: In order to lead a wholesome life is it sufficient to keep the five precepts? I feel that so long as one does not harm others there are no defilements. Is that right?

Answer: We may keep the precepts, but that does not mean that we have eradicated defilements. Only arahats are without defilements. We should develop understanding of our different cittas and then we shall discover that there are many more akusala cittas than kusala cittas.

There are different degrees of defilements, they can be coarse, medium or subtle. Evil deeds through body, speech or mind are coarse defilements. But even when we do not commit evil deeds there are countless akusala cittas and these are medium defilements. For example, attachment or aversion may not motivate an unwholesome deed, but they are still akusala and thus dangerous.

Akusala citta which arises falls away but the unwholesome tendency is accumulated and it can condition the arising of akusala again. The unwholesome tendencies which are accumulated are subtle defilements. Even though they are called subtle, they are dangerous. They are like microbes infesting the body, they can show effects at any time. So long as these tendencies have not been eradicated they can condition the arising of akusala citta and akusala kamma, and we have to continue in the cycle of birth and death.

Objects are experienced through the five senses and through the mind-door.

In the sense-door processes and in the mind-door processes there are

'javana-cittas', cittas which are, if one is not an arahat, either kusala cittas or akusala cittas. For example, when there has been seeing which experiences only visible object and does not know anything else, there can be akusala cittas arising in the eye-door process on account of what has been seen. These are beyond control and arise because of their own conditions. When we do not apply ourselves to dana, sila or bhavana, the javana-cittas are akusala cittas and most of the time we do not notice it.

Clinging is likely to arise very often after seeing and after the other sense-impressions. After there has been seeing there may be thinking of concepts and also the thinking is akusala when we do not apply ourselves to kusala. It is often accompanied by clinging. Attachment can be accompanied by pleasant feeling or by indifferent feeling. We may not notice attachment when it is accompanied by indifferent feeling. We like to perceive all the familiar things around us, such as furniture or other possessions. We would not like to miss noticing them and this shows our clinging. When we are sitting, do we like softness? When we sit on a hard floor, there is bound to be aversion. Aversion is conditioned by clinging.

When there is awareness of different realities we shall know that there are many more akusala cittas than we ever thought. It is better to know the truth than to deceive ourselves.

Even when we can keep the precepts and do not transgress them for a long time, it does not mean that we shall never neglect them. So long as we have not become a sotapanna, someone who has attained the first stage of enlightenment, there are still conditions for akusala kamma which may produce an unhappy rebirth. When there is, for example, danger for our life, we may neglect sila. Only right understanding of nama and rupa can eventually, when one has attained to the stage of the sotapanna, condition purify of sila to the degree that one never neglects again the five precepts.

Question: Although I know that gain, honour and praise do not last and can only arise when there are conditions for their arising, I cannot help being distressed when I do not get the rank or position I believe I deserve. What can I do in order to have less ambitions?

Answer: We are ambitious because we find ourselves important. Our clinging makes us unhappy. While we strive to get something there is clinging. Also when we obtain what we want we keep on holding tight. Clinging is the cause of endless frustrations. We want the 'self' to become more important but then it will be all the harder to eradicate it. If we think more of others the self will become less important.

We may have thought about the impermanence of conditioned realities, about the impermanence of all pleasant objects, but if we do not develop direct understanding of the realities which appear, panna is not strong enough to lessen clinging.

We should not only develop understanding when we are disappointed and unhappy, but we should begin right now. If we do not begin now, how can there ever be less clinging to the self? We cling so much to our body, but in reality there are only different elements, such as solidity, cohesion, temperature and motion. Hardness may appear and if there is awareness of it there can be understanding that it is only hardness, not a body which belongs to us.

Hardness is only hardness, no matter it is hardness of what we call the body or hardness outside. If there is awareness of it when it appears we will begin to see it as an element, not self. When understanding of nama and rupa is being developed we shall also see that realities such as honour or praise are only elements and that they do not belong to a self. Thus there will be more confidence in the Dhamma and we will consider the Dhamma more precious than honour or praise.

We can easily be infatuated by gains, favours, or flattery. They are treacherous, because they seem desirable, but they lead to misery. In the

'Kindred Sayings' (II, Nidana Vagga, Ch XVII, Kindred Sayings on Gain and

Favours) there are forty-three suttas which point out to us the danger of gains, favour and flatteries. They are as dangerous as a fisherman's hook to the fish, as a thunderbolt, as a poisoned dart which wounds a man, as a hurricane which hurls a bird apart. People who do not easily lie tell deliberately lies when they are overcome by desire for gains, favours and flatteries. We read in par. 10:

'Dire, monks, are gains, favours, and flattery, a bitter, harsh obstacle in the way of arriving at uttermost safety.

Concerning this matter, I see one person overcome, and whose mind is possessed by favours, another who is overcome and possessed by lack of favours, yet another who is overcome and possessed by both favours and the lack of them--- I see one and all, at the separation of the body after death reborn in the Waste, the Woeful Way, the Downfall, Hell.

So dire, monks, are gains... Verily thus must you train yourselves: "When gains, favours, and flattery come to us, we will put them aside, nor when they come shall they take lasting hold on our hearts."

In whom, when favours fall upon him, or
When none are shown, the mind steadfast, intent,
Sways not at all, for earnest is his life,
Him of rapt thought, (of will) unfaltering,
Of fine perception, of the vision seer,
Rejoicing that to grasp is his no more:
Him let the people call in truth Good man.'
With Metta,

Nina van Gorkom

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